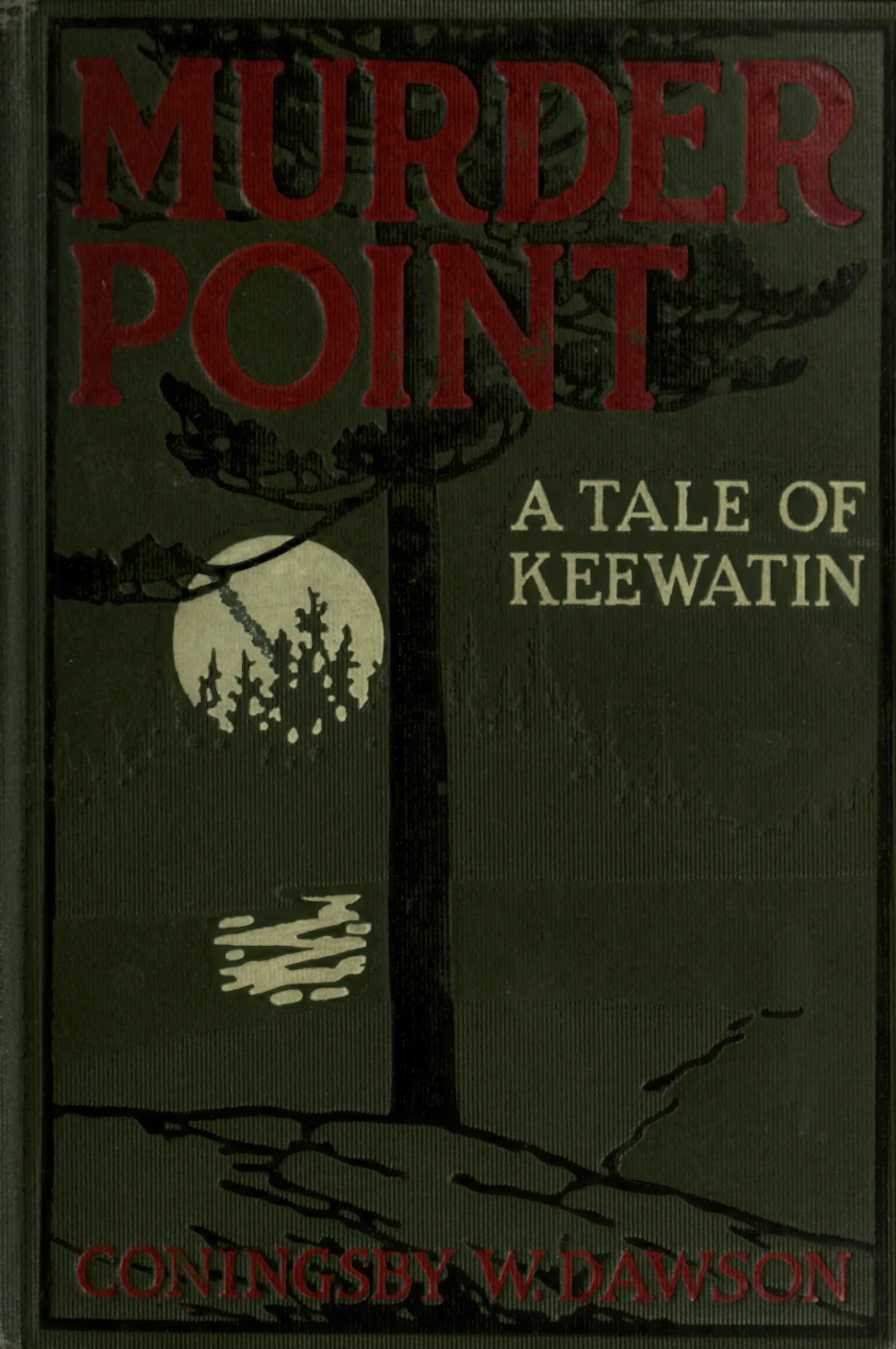
MURDER POINT

A TALE OF KEEWATIN



CONINGSBY W. DAWSON

MURDER POINT

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The House of the Weeping Woman
HODDER AND STOUGHTON, LONDON

The Worker and Other Poems
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MURDER POINT

A Tale of Keewatin

BY

CONINGSBY WILLIAM DAWSON

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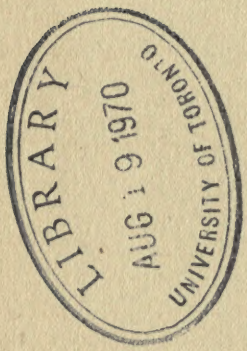

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MURDER POINT

CHAPTER I

JOHN GRANGER OF MURDER POINT

JOHN GRANGER, agent on the Last Chance River in the interests of Garnier, Parwin, and Wrath, independent traders in the territory of Keewatin, sat alone in his store at Murder Point. He sat upon an upturned box, with an empty pipe between his lips. In the middle of the room stood an iron stove which blazed red hot; through the single window, toward which he faced, the gold sun shone, made doubly resplendent in its shining by the reflected light cast up by the leagues of all-surrounding snow and ice.

Speaking to himself, as is the habit of men who have lived many months alone in the aboriginal silence of the North, "Well, and what next?" he asked.

He had been reviewing the uses to which he had put his thirty years of life, and was feeling far from satisfied. That a man of breeding, who had been given the advantages of a classical and university education, and was in addition an English barrister, should at the age of thirty be conducting an independent trader's store in a distant part of northern Canada did not seem right; Granger was conscious of the incongruity. During the past two years and a half he had obstinately refused to examine his

career, had fought against introspection, and had striven to forget.

In this he had been wise, for Keewatin is not a good place wherein to *remember* and to balance the ledger of the soul; it is too remote from human habitation, too near to God — its vastness has robbed it of all standards, so that small misdemeanours may seem huge and disastrous as the sin of Cain. Madness lurks in its swampy creeks and wanders along the edges of its woodland seas, so that the border-line between natural and supernatural is very faintly marked.

But to-day Granger had given way before the wave of emotional memories and had permitted his mind to recapitulate all the happiness which he had lost; and with this result, that like a child in a darkened house he feared to advance and stood still trembling, questioning the future, anticipating and dreading that which was next to come. It was the second week in April; the break-up of the winter had almost begun; the spring was striding up from the south and a cry of travel was in the air, both hopeful and melancholy. The world would soon be growing young again. Even in this desperate land the scars of the frost would soon be obliterated; but to his own life, he was painfully aware, the spring had vouchsafed no promise of return. Was it gone forever? he asked.

At the present moment he was remembering London and St. James's Park with its banks of daffodils and showers of white may-blossom, its groups of laughing children at play, its parade of black-coated horsemen, with here and there the scarlet flash of a Life-guard as he sped trotting by, and for bass accompaniment to this music of the Joy of Life the continual low thunder

which in the Mall the prancing hoofs of countless carriage-horses strummed.

Now it was Piccadilly in which he wandered, returning from the west with his back toward the setting sun; the street-lamps had just been kindled, and ahead of him, massed above the housetops, the blue-grey clouds of evening hung. He watched the faces of the people as they passed, some eager, some jaded, some pleasure-seeking, some smug, and he strove to conjecture their aim in life. At the Circus he paused awhile, breathing deep and filling out his lungs with fragrance of violets and narcissi, which flower-girls clamoured for him to purchase. He bought a bunch and smiled faintly, contrasting the beautiful significance of the name of the vendor's profession with the slatternly person to whom it was applied. Then onwards he went to Leicester Square where the dazzling lights of music-halls flared and quickened, and scarlet-lipped Folly smiled out upon him from street corners, and beckoned through the dusk. In the old days it had always been when he had attained this point in his advance that the pleasure of London had failed, leaving him with a cramped sensation, a frenzied desire for escape, and an overwhelming sense of the inherent rottenness of western civilisation. It was upon such occasions that he saw, or thought he saw, the inevitable tendency of European cities to emasculate and corrupt the rugged nobilities of mankind. A revolt against artificiality had followed. Immediately, there in the heart of the world's greatest city, there had grown up about him the mirage of the primeval forest, whose boughs are steeped in silence, borne up by tall bare trunks, which lured him on to explore and adventure through untried lands, where

quiet grows intense and intenser at each new step, till he should arrive at that ultimate contentment for which he blindly sought.

He laughed at the memory, smiling bitterly at the manner in which that former self had been beguiled. As if to give emphasis to his jest he arose from his box, lounged over to the window, cleared its panes of mist with his hand, and gazed out upon the landscape of his choice. It stared back at him with immobile effrontery, with the glazed wide-parted eyes of the prostrate prize-fighter who, in his falling, has been stunned — eyes in which hatred is the only sign of life. He threw back his head and guffawed at the conceit, as though it had been conceived by a brain and given utterance to by a voice other than his own. Then he paused, drew himself erect, and his face went white; he had heard of solitary men in Keewatin who had commenced by laughing to themselves, and had ended by committing murder or suicide. Yet, as he stood in thought, he acknowledged the truth of the image; his existence on the Last Chance River was one long and wearisome struggle between himself and the intangible prize-fighter, whoever he might be, — Nature, the Elemental Spirit hostile to Creation, Keewatin, the Devil, call him what you like. Sometimes he had had the better of the combat, in which case days of peace had followed; but for the most part he stood at bay or crouched upon his knees, watching for his opportunity to rise; at his strongest he had only just sufficed to hold his invisible antagonist in check, battling for a victory which had been already awarded. He had long despaired of winning; the only question which now troubled him was "How long shall I be able to fight?"

A certain story current in the district, concerning a Hudson Bay factor, flashed through his mind. At the beginning of the frost his fort had been stricken with smallpox; one by one his six white companions had died and the Indians had fled in terror, leaving him alone in the silence. In the unpeopled solitude of the long dark winter days and nights which had followed, he had grown strangely curious as to the welfare of his soul, and had petitioned God that it might be disembodied so that he might gaze upon it with his living eyes. After a week of continuous prayer, he had fastened on his snowshoes, and gone out upon the ice to seek God's sign. He had not travelled far before he had come to the mound where his six companions lay buried. There against the dusky sky-line he had seen a famished wolf standing over a scooped-out grave. So the factor had had his sign, and had looked upon his disembodied soul with his own eyes.

When the ice broke up and the first canoe of half-breed voyageurs swept up to the fort, they had been met by a man who crawled upon hands and knees, and snarled like a husky or a coyote.

Granger shrugged his shoulders and shuddered. He thanked his God that the spring was near by. Upon one thing he was determined, that whatever happened, though he should have to die by his own hand, he would not grovel into Eternity upon his hands and knees as had that factor of the Hudson Bay.

For relief from the turbulence of his thoughts he turned his attention to the frozen quiet of the world without. Not a feature in the landscape had changed throughout all the past five months. He had nothing new to learn about it: he had even committed to memory

where each separate shadow would fall at each particular hour of the day. Straight out of the west the river ran so far as eye could reach, until it came to Murder Point. At close of day it seemed a molten pathway which led, without a waver, from Granger's store directly to the heart of the sun. Having arrived at the Point, the Last Chance River swept round to the northeast, and then to the north, until in many curves it poured its waters into the distant Hudson Bay. Its banks, in the open season, which lasted from May to October, were low and muddy; the country through which it flowed, known as the barren lands, was for the most part flat and densely wooded with a stunted growth of black spruce, jackpine, tamarack, poplar, willow, and birch. The river was the only highway: much of the forest which lay back from its banks was entirely unexplored on account of its swamps and the closeness of its underbrush. There were places within three miles of Murder Point where a white man had never travelled, and some where not even the Indians could penetrate. Partly for this reason the district was rich in game: the caribou, moose, lynx, bear, wolf, beaver, wolverine, and all the smaller fur-bearing animals of the North abounded there. Seventy miles to the southwestward lay the nearest point of white habitation, where stood the Hudson Bay Company's Fort of God's Voice. Between Murder Point and the coast, for two hundred and fifty miles, there was no white settlement until the river's mouth was reached, where the Company's House of the Crooked Creek had been erected on the shores of the Bay. With his nearest neighbours, seventy miles distant at God's Voice, Granger had no intercourse, for he was regarded by

them as an outcast inasmuch as he was an independent trader. Once was the time when Prince Rupert's *Company of Adventurers of England trading in the Hudson's Bay* had held the monopoly of the fur trade over all this territory, from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific Coast; then to have been caught trapping or trading privately had meant almost certain death to the trespasser. Now that the powers of the Company had been curtailed, the only manner in which a Hudson Bay factor could show his displeasure toward the interloper was by ignoring his presence — a very real penalty in a land of loneliness, where, at the best, men can only hope to meet once or twice a year — and by rendering his existence as unbearable and silent as possible in every lawful and private way. In the art of ostracising, Robert Pilgrim, the factor at God's Voice, was a past master; during the two and a half years that Granger had been in Keewatin he had had direct communication with no one of the Company's white employees. On occasions certain of its Cree Indians and half-breed trappers had come to him stealthily, at dead of night, to see whether he would not offer them better terms for their season's catch of furs, or to inquire whether he would not give them liquor in exchange, the selling of which to an Indian in Keewatin is a punishable offence. These were usually loose characters who, being heavily in debt to the Company, were trying to postpone payment by selling to Granger on the sly; yet, even these men, when day had dawned, would pass him on the river without recognition, as if he were a stick or a block of ice. However, only by dealing with such renegades could he hope to pick up any profit for the proprietors of his store. His every gain was a loss to the factor,

and *vice versa;* therefore by Robert Pilgrim he was not greatly beloved.

Pilgrim was a man of conservative principles, who looked back with longing to the days when a factor was supreme in his own domain, holding discretionary powers over all his people's lives, who, after the giving of a third warning to an independent trader found poaching in his district, could dispose of him more or less barbarously according to his choice. Now that every man, whatever his company, had an equal right to gather furs in the Canadian North, he considered that he and his employers were being robbed; wherefore he made it his business to see that no friendship existed between any of his subordinates and the man at Murder Point. Hence it happened that in summer when the canoes and York boats, and in winter when the dog-teams and runners from God's Voice, went up and down river by the free-trading store of Garnier, Parwin and Wrath, no head was turned, and no sign given that anyone was aware that a white man, yearning for a handshake and the sound of spoken words, was regarding them with sorrowful eyes from the wind-swept spit of land.

Two years and a half ago, on his first arrival, Granger had laughed at the factor's petty persecution and had pretended not to mind. Since then, as his isolation had grown on him, his temper had changed, his pride had given way, until, in the January of the present year, he had journeyed down to the Company's fort, and had implored them to speak to him, if only to curse him, that his reason might be saved. The gates of the fort had been clanged in his face, and he had been silently threatened with a loaded rifle, till resurrected shame had driven him away.

He had since heard that Pilgrim had said on that occasion, "I knew that he would come and that this would happen sooner or later. I've been waiting for it; but he's held out longer than the last one."

This remark explained to Granger how it was that, when he had arrived in Winnipeg, having just returned from the Klondike, and had applied to his acquaintance Wrath for employment, his request had been so readily granted. He had marvelled at the time that he, who had had next to no experience in Indian trading, should have met with immediate engagement, and have been given sole charge of an outpost. Now he knew the reason; he had been given his job because his employers could get no one else to take it. From the first day of his coming to Murder Point strange stories had reached his ears concerning the diverse and sudden ways in which its by-gone agents had departed this life: some by committing murder against themselves; some by committing murder against others; some, having gone mad, by wandering off into the winter wilderness to die; others, who were reckoned sane, by attempting to make the six hundred and eighty mile journey back to civilisation alone across the snow and ice. These rumours he had not credited at first, supposing them to be fictions invented by Pilgrim for the purpose of shattering his confidence, and thus inducing him to leave at once. The last remark of the factor, however, inasmuch as it had been reported to him by an honest man, the Jesuit priest Père Antoine, had proved to him that they were not all lies. When he had questioned Père Antoine himself, the kindly old man had shaken his head, refusing to answer, and had departed on his way. This had happened shortly after the occurrence in

January; since then Granger had been less than ever happy in his mind.

Luckily for him, about this time Beorn Ericsen, the Man with the Dead Soul, as he was named, the only white Company trapper in the district, had quarrelled with the factor over the price which had been offered him for a silver fox; in revenge he had betaken himself to Granger, bringing with him his half-breed daughter, Peggy, and his son, Eyelids. Their chance coming had saved his sanity; moreover it had furnished him with something to think about, besides himself, namely Peggy. His courtship of her had been short and informal, as is the way of white men when dealing with women of a darker shade: within a week he had taken her to himself. But Peggy had had ideas of her own upon the nebulous question of morals, ideas which she had gained in the two years during which she had attended a Catholic school in Winnipeg; she had refused to be regarded as a squaw, since the blood which flowed in her veins was fully half white, and, after staying with him for a fortnight, had taken herself off, joining her father on a hunting trip, giving Granger clearly to understand that she would not live with him again until Père Antoine should have come that way and united them according to the rites of the Roman Church.

As he stood by the window looking out across the frost-bound land which once, years since, in Leicester Square, he in his ignorance had so much desired, he re-pondered these events and, "Well, and what next?" he asked.

The touch of spring in the air, recalling him to England and the old days, had made him realise among other things what this marriage with a half-breed girl, sup-

posing he consented, must entail. It would exile him forever. No matter howsoever well he might prosper, or rich he might become, or whatsoever stroke of good fortune might visit him, he could never return to his English mother and English friends, bringing with him a half-breed wife and children who had Indian blood. If he married her, he would become what Pilgrim had named him — an outcast. If he did not marry her, she would refuse to live with him, and he would be left lonely as before and would probably become insane. Since he was never likely to become either prosperous, or rich, or fortunate, would it not be better for him to provide for his immediate happiness, he asked, and let the future take care of itself? Even while he asked the question another woman intruded her face: she was slim, and fair, and delicately made, and was disguised in the male attire of a Yukon placer-miner. She seemed to be asking him to remember her.

He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, as if defying Fate: turning away from the window, he re-seated himself upon the upturned box by the red-hot stove.

Pooh! he'd been a fool to give way to retrospection. He was no exception to the general rule; most men mismanaged their careers — more or less. Still, he was bound to confess that he had done so rather more than less. Oh well, he would settle down to his fate. As for that other girl in the Yukon miner's dress, who would keep intruding herself, she also must be forgotten.

But at that point, perversely enough, he began to think about her. What was she doing at the present time? Where was she? Did she still remember him? Had she made her fortune up there out of their last

big strike? How had she construed his sudden and unexplained departure? He swore softly to himself, and rising, went over to the window again. Then he pressed closer as if to make certain of something, gazing up the long glimmering stretch of frozen river to the west.

There was a strange man coming down; strange to those parts, at any rate, though Granger seemed to recognise something familiar in his stride. He was driving his dogs furiously, lashing them on with frenzied brutality, coming on apace, turning his head ever and again from side to side, peering across his shoulder and looking behind, as if he feared a thing which followed him — which was out of sight.

CHAPTER II

THE UNBIDDEN GUEST

GRANGER, having withdrawn himself to one side of the window so that he might not be observed from the outside, watched the stranger's approach in anxious silence. Nearer and nearer he came, till in that still air it was possible to hear the panting of his huskies as they lunged forward in the traces, jerking their bodies to right and left as they desperately strove to escape the descending lash of the punishing whip. The man himself tottered as he ran, stubbing the toes of his snowshoes every now and then as he took a new step. Once from sheer weakness he nearly fell, whereupon the dogs came to a sudden halt, sat down on their haunches, and gazed wistfully round; in a second he had recovered himself, with an angry oath had straightened out his team in their traces, and was once more speeding toward Granger's shack. The impression which his mode of travelling conveyed was that of flight; but from whom and whither can a man flee in Keewatin? Both he and his animals were evidently exhausted; they must have journeyed continuously through the previous day and night, and still they were in haste. "Well, all the better for me," thought the watcher, "for if he is so weary he cannot choose but stay; and if he stays with me, though he be a Company man, he will have to speak."

Then fear seized hold of Granger lest Robert Pilgrim's discipline, or the enmity of the man himself, might be such that, though he endangered his life by the procedure, he would refuse the hospitality of a hated private trader. "Nonsense," said the voice of hope, "to where can he be travelling at this season of the year unless to Murder Point? Before ever he gets to the coast and Crooked Creek the winter will have broken up, and northwards there is nowhere else to go."

So, as is the way with men who have exhausted this world's resources for rendering them aid, he began to pray; not decorously, with reverent, well-chosen words, but fiercely, with repetition, and below his breath. "My God, don't let him pass," he said; "make him stop here. Make him stop here, and spend with me at least one night." Then, when he had petitioned God, thinking perhaps that He would not hear him, he commenced to call upon Lord Jesus Christ. He clenched his hands in his excitement till the nails broke into the flesh. There was a God in Keewatin after all, there must be, since He had sent to him this stranger.

All the while that he was praying and exclaiming thus, he was trying to judge of the man's errand from his dress. He was clad in the regulation capote of the Hudson Bay Company's employee; it was of a dark material, probably duffel, which reached to the knees. On his head was a fur-skin cap, over which he had drawn the hood of his capote so far down that his features could not be discerned. About his waist went a sash of scarlet, such as is worn by the Northwest *mêtis*. His legs were swathed in duffel leggings, so that they appeared to be of enormous size. On his feet he wore moose-hide moccasins which extended part way up his

legs, and to these his five-foot snowshoes were attached. His whip he carried in his left hand. About this last there was something familiar. Who was it that he had known in the past who had driven his dogs left-handed, and had had that swinging, plunging stride? The memory refused to concentrate, so he strove to guess at the man's identity by the process of elimination. He could not be a Hudson Bay mail-carrier bringing him a letter, for the factor refused to deliver all missives addressed to Murder Point. It was not probable that he was an express messenger of Garnier, Parwin, and Wrath, sent up post-haste from Winnipeg; they could have nothing of such importance to say to him that it could not wait for the open season, when travelling is less expensive. Nor was he a trapper bound on a friendly or business visit to the store; for, in the first place, this man was no Indian (he could tell that by the way in which he lifted his feet in running), and, in the second, he had no friend, nor any man in the district, save Ericsen, who would be seen with him in the open daylight. A foolish, strangling expectancy rose up within him. Might he not be the bearer of important and good news from the homeland? What news? Oh, anything! That his father, the visionary explorer of Guiana, who twenty years ago had set out on his last mad search for El Dorado, the fabled city of the Incas, and who for many years had been given up for dead, had returned at length with gold, successful from his quest — or, at the least, that his mother had relented and wanted him back. Speedily his hope turned to agonising suspense. Perhaps he was coming to tell him that his mother in England was dead. Then he laughed hysterically, remembering that Mr. Wrath was not the

sort of man to regard any death as serious, unless it were his own.

By this time the stranger had covered the intervening two miles of river and was within thirty yards of the Point. He was slowing down. He had halted. His exhausted dogs were already curling themselves up beneath a snow-bank, wisely snatching a moment's rest as soon as it was offered them. Careless of their welfare, leaving them as they were to tangle up their traces, he was commencing to ascend the mound towards the store. Despite the clamour of welcome which raged within him, Granger did not stir; the influence of the North Land was upon him, compelling him to self-repression, making him stern and forbidding in his manner as was the appearance of the world without. From his hiding by the window he watched the man; as he did so a vague sense of fear and loathing took the place of gladness.

His approach was slow and hesitating; continually he paused to gaze back along the river as if in search of a pursuer, then suddenly forward toward the shack as if for spying eyes which were reading his secret. Before he had come near enough to be recognised, he had pulled the hood still further forward, holding it together above his mouth with his right hand, so that of his face only his eyes were visible. With his left hand he fumbled in his breast, and Granger knew that he grasped a loaded weapon. "Does he mean to kill me?" he wondered; yet he made no effort to bar the door, or to reach for the rifle which hung on the wall above his head. He only smiled whimsically, amused that anyone should waste so much care over robbing a man of a possession which he himself so little valued

— his life. Personally he would welcome so easy a method of departure from Keewatin — one which was quite respectable, and would attach no responsibility to himself. When all has been said, there remain but two qualities of fear: the fear of life, and the fear of death. Granger was only conscious of the first, therefore he could afford to be amazingly daring under the present circumstances. Now he could no longer see the man, for he was standing beneath the walls of the shack; but he could hear that he was listening, and could hear him gasp for breath. One, two, three slow footsteps, and the latch was raised and the door flung wide. He waited for his guest to enter, and then, because he delayed, "Come inside," he cried; "confound you, you're letting in the cold air."

He heard the snowshoes lifted across the threshold and rose to greet the stranger who, so soon as he had entered, made fast the door and confronted him without a word, still hiding his face from sight. He was a tall man, well over six feet and proportionately broad of chest; he had to stoop his head as he stood in the store, since the roof was none too high.

After some seconds spent in silent gazing, "Well, and what d'you want?" asked the trader. The man made no reply, but tossed him a screw of paper which, when he had unfolded it and smoothed it out, read, "*Do all that is in your power to help the bearer. I am responsible. Destroy this so soon as it is read.*" The note was unsigned, but it was in the handwriting of Wrath. Granger slid back the door of the grate and watched the scrap of paper vanish in a little spurt of flame. Then he looked up, and seeing that the man still stood regarding him and had removed none of his

garments, not even his snowshoes from which the crusted ice was already melting, "All right," he said; "I'll do my best. You must be tired, and have come a long journey."

"I have," said the stranger, throwing back his hood, and for the first time displaying his face.

Granger sprang forward with a startled cry, and seized the newcomer by his mittened hand. "By God, it's Spurling!"

In a flash all the winter had thawed out of his nature and the spring, which he had despaired of, had returned. Once more he was an emotional living creature, with a throbbing heart and brain, instead of a carcass which walked, and was erect, and muttered occasional words with its mouth as if it were alive, and was in reality a dead thing to which burial had been denied.

"Yes, it's Spurling," replied the traveller in a hoarse, uneager voice; then, "Has anyone been here before me?"

Granger shook his head, and instinctively stood back a pace from this leaden-eyed, unresponsive stranger, who had been his friend.

Spurling was quick to notice the revulsion. "And are you going to desert me and turn me out?"

"Desert you! If you knew how lonely I have been you wouldn't ask that question."

"I ought to know," he answered, and going over to the window looked out, turning his head from side to side in that furtive manner which Granger had noted in him when he had first seen him advancing across the ice.

Facing about suddenly, he asked, "Is there any way out of here, except down there?" pointing to the river frozen in its bed, stretching away interminably to the

west, through groves of icicles, and marble forest, like a granite roadway hewn out and levelled by a giant, vanished race.

"There is no other," Granger replied, "unless you include the way out which is trodden by the dead."

Spurling started almost angrily at the mention of this last pathway of escape, and scowled. It was evident that the fear which made his life a burden was the fear of death—which was proof to Granger that he had not been long in Keewatin. However, he controlled himself and murmured, "Six hundred and eighty miles is a long journey, and it's all that to Winnipeg. Within a fortnight the ice will break, and then for almost a month the only way will be impassable. Thank God for that!" Addressing himself to Granger, "And what lies ahead?" he asked.

"The forest and three hundred odd miles of this Last Chance River till you come to the Hudson Bay and the House of the Crooked Creek."

"Is there nothing in between?"

"Only the Forbidden River, which neither white man nor Indian ever travels; it joins the Last Chance a hundred miles ahead."

"Ah, the Forbidden River! And no one ever travels there! Why not? Is it shallow or rapid? But then there is the winter; it cannot be that there's anything that doesn't freeze up here."

"Oh, it freezes right enough."

"Then?"

"The Indians are afraid to travel it."

"Of what are they afraid?"

"Manitous, and shades of the departed."

For the first time Spurling's face relaxed, the hunted

expression went out of his eyes; he almost smiled. "Well, I'm not afraid of them," he said.

He commenced to unfasten his snowshoes and to take off the heavier portions of his dress. Granger stood by and watched him; he was puzzled by the man's manner, and heartsick with disappointment. What was the reason for the change which had crept over him in the three years since they had parted, and why had he made this journey at this season of the year, in haste, without warning? Six hundred and eighty miles seemed a long way to travel in winter, through a desolate land, only to tell your most intimate friend that you are not afraid of manitous and shades of the departed.

He recalled the man whom he had known, so generous and open-hearted, who had walked with him at night beneath the London gas-lamps, sharing and comprehending those dreams and enthusiasms which others had derided, or compassionated as delusions of the mad. This was the man who had given him what might have been his chance, had he only been able to use it aright. Like a tawdry curtain drawn up at a Christmas pantomime on a dazzling transformation scene, so, at the memory, the veil of the present was instantly removed, revealing only the flashing splendours of past things, which lay behind. This same body which now crouched basely here before him had belonged to a hero once — to the man who, five long years since, had pushed on in spite of defeat, carrying with him by his courage his despairing companion over the deadly Skaguay trail. The Skaguay, where bodies of horses lay unburied, spreading pestilence abroad every hundred yards of the way; where the army of gold-seekers turning back was as great as the army

pressing on; and those of the attack had momentarily to stand aside, so narrow was the path, for the wounded and spent of the retreat, who passed them by with ashen faces, some of them with death in their eyes, bidding them, "Turn back! Turn back! You will never get through alive."

Many a time when his shoulders were bruised and broken, and he ached in every limb, and his clothes were sodden with rain, which he knew must shortly become stiff as boards when night had fallen and it had begun to freeze, and perhaps another horse had fallen and been left beside the trail, he also would have joined the retreat right gladly, unashamed of his cowardice, had not Spurling picked up his load with a laugh and dragged him on. What a fine brave fellow he had been in those early Yukon days! Why, it was he who, when they had reached the summit of that heart-breaking pass, had rescued young Mordaunt. Jervis Mordaunt, with a single horse, had packed his entire outfit single-handed to the topmost point of the trail, and then, when the hardest part of his journey had been accomplished and his goal was already in sight, his horse had given out and died. When they had come up with him, his beast had been dead three days, and, because he could not afford a new one, he had been packing his stuff on his own narrow shoulders into Bennett, whence the start by water for Dawson had to be made — a hopeless task, for Mordaunt was not a strong fellow, but slim and extraordinarily girlish in frame. Many of the travellers who had already attained the summit were flinging away their outfits and turning back in panic, terrified by stories which they had heard of winter and starvation in the Klondike; those who still

trudged doggedly forward were too selfishly preoccupied with visions of gold, and their own concerns, and fears lest the rivers and lakes should close up, to render him aid. Not so Spurling; in those days he was never too busy to lend an unfortunate a helping hand; besides, like most brave men, the thing which he valued highest was courage, and he was taken with the young chap's pluck. "I'm fairly broad," he had said, "and before the river freezes there's plenty of time for all three of us to get drowned. So look sharp, my girl, and hand your bundles up." From the first day he had nicknamed Mordaunt "The Girl," because he was so surpassingly modest and had no beard to shave. So he and Spurling had shouldered Mordaunt's burden, and had made him their partner, and had carried him through to the gold-fields alive.

Where was Jervis now? he wondered; then his thoughts returned to the panorama of that eventful journey. He remembered how in the mouth of the Windy Arm on Tagish Lake, when the sail swung round and sent him spinning overboard, he would most certainly have perished in those chill waters had not Spurling jumped in and held him up till the boat put back. It was Spurling's hand which had kept the boat steady in the boiling rapids of the White Horse, when he and Mordaunt had lost their nerve — yes, that same hand which was now plucking restlessly at the untrimmed beard which fringed that crafty, sullen face. How incredible it seemed that this body should contain the same man, and that the change should have taken place in five years! He contrasted that big-shouldered, song-singing fellow who had given them of his endless store of courage when their own was spent, compelling them to go through

the mush ice at Five Fingers, and the drift ice at Fort Selkirk, and had landed them safely at Dawson almost against their will, the last boat through before the Klondike froze up, with this secretive hang-dog individual who slunk through an unpeopled wilderness, twisting his neck from side to side, as though he already felt the halter there — like a Seven Dials assassin, fearful of arrest. There he sat by the window, with eyes fixed uncannily on the west, watching for the follower whom he could not see, but only felt.

He turned round uncomfortably, feeling that Granger's eyes were upon him; then rose up abruptly, saying, "Ha, I was forgetting! My dogs must be fed."

Granger watched him go out, and was glad of relief from his presence. If anyone had come to him a week ago and had said, "Druce Spurling will be here this day or next," his joy would have surpassed all bounds. Now he realised that there is a worse evil than solitude — the compulsory companionship of a man who once was, and is no longer, your friend. "Ach!" he muttered shivering, "I feel as if I had been sitting with my feet in an open grave." Then remorsefully he added, "The poor chap's in trouble. He was good to me in days gone by: I'll do my best to help him. Perhaps that's the kind of offal that I appeared to Robert Pilgrim when I made my journey to God's Voice last January, and he threatened to shoot me; yet, God forbid that I ever looked like that. Maybe that which I seem to see in Spurling is only the reflected change in myself. Christ pity us lonely men!"

From the window he could see how Spurling was gathering his dogs around him, leading them past the Point northward to a bend where they could not be

seen by a man approaching from up-river. What was the meaning of such precaution? Why had he been so urgently requested to help the one man in the world whom he was most likely to help without urging, since he had been his closest friend? Why had he been ordered to destroy the note immediately when read? And why had Spurling, whom he had thought to be in Klondike making his pile, or having taken advantage of the secret knowledge which he had unwisely shared with him, to be in Guiana, sailing up the Great Amana seeking El Dorado, travelled these thousands of miles by sea and land only to visit him here in Keewatin thus surlily? Was it to hide? Well, if that was his purpose, there wasn't much chance of his being followed, or if followed, found.

CHAPTER III

THE DEVIL IN THE KLONDIKE

SPURLING, having returned from feeding his dogs, had reseated himself by the window, but he had not again spoken. When Granger had informed him that a meal was ready, and had called to him to come and partake, he had only shaken his head. When, however, it had been brought to him, he had eaten hungrily, bolting his food like a famished husky, yet never looking at what he ate, for his eyes were directed along the river-bed. He used neither fork nor spoon, carrying whatever was set before him hastily to his mouth in his hands. His whole attitude was one of hurry; he rested in haste, as if begrudging the moments which were lost from travel.

Had he been the foremost runner in some great race, who had fallen at the last lap, and, waiting to recover himself before making the final dash toward the tape, watched anxiously lest his next rival should round the bend, and surprise him before he was up on his feet again, he could not have been more tensely excited. His breath came in gasps and spasms; his body jerked and trembled even while he sat. He began to do things, and did not finish them. He opened his mouth to speak, and was silent. He half rose to his feet, and fell back again. He turned his head to look at Granger, then thought better of it, and continued staring into the west.

Granger watched him, and wondered what might be the secret which he was hesitating to impart. Was his mind a blank through weariness? Was he arguing out some dreadful problem within himself? Or was he only mad?

What frail and isolated creatures we are! — when once our power of communicating thought is gone, though we breathe and move above the earth, we are more distant one from another than if we were truly dead; for, when a soul has totally forsaken its body, and the body has ceased to express, we, who live, can at least imagine that the thing departed sometimes returns and hovers within ourselves. To live and be silent is a remoter banishment from Life than the irrevocable exile decreed by Death.

Granger could now see that the change which he had noted in Spurling might quite well have been the work of a month or two months, and was due to trouble and neglect. The man was unwashed and unfed, and for many nights he had not slept. His eyes were ringed and bloodshot with fatigue, and with incipient snow-blindness. His cheeks were sunken and cadaverous with too much travel; his body was limp with over-work. Should the cause of his excitement be suddenly removed, he would collapse; it was nervous courage which upheld him. And there, despite all these alterations for the worse, he could still discern the old Spurling — the man whom he had loved. The brows retained their old frown of impudent defiance, and the mouth its good-humoured, reckless contempt. These had been overlaid by some baser passion, it was true; but they remained, showed through, and seemed recoverable. As he looked, the memory flashed through his mind of

Spurling at his proudest — on that night at the Mascot dance-hall, when they had carried into Dawson City the news of the great bonanza they had struck at Drunkman's Shallows. He was standing on a table, surrounded by a group of miners, leading the singing, roaring out the doggerel chorus of a local mining ballad:

> "Oh, we'll be there with our bags of gold
> When the Judgment trumpets blare,
> When the stars drop dead and the moon stands cold,
> Tell the angels we'll be there."

Ha, the power of the man and his consciousness of conquest!

Half to himself he began to hum the tune, beating time on the bare boards with his moccasined feet. In a moment Spurling had jumped up, "For God's sake, stop! I can't endure that," he cried. "Oh, to think of it, that I am come to this, and that it is like this we meet after all these years!" He covered his face with his hands, and, sinking weakly back in the chair, commenced to sob. Granger went towards him, and bending over him, flung an arm around his neck. For the moment the body before him was forgotten; the noble spirit of the man who had once stood by and helped him, was alone remembered. "Druce, tell me all," he said.

"I can't; you would shun me."

"Then why did you come if you could not trust me?"

"There was nowhere else to go — no other way of escape. They were all around me."

"Who were all around you?"

"Those who had come to take me to be hanged."

Granger gasped, and shrank aside. Then his worst

conjecture was correct — it was as bad as that! murder had been done.

Spurling drew himself up suddenly, throwing back his hands and uncovering a face of ghastly paleness. One might have supposed that he had been the startled witness to the confession, instead of the man who had made it.

"What was that I said just now?" he asked. "You must not believe it. It is not true; I am tired and overstrained. They've hunted me so long that I myself have come almost to believe their squalid accusations. Don't look at me like that; I tell you I am innocent. . . . Oh well, perhaps I did fire the shot; but, if I did, it was an accident. I didn't know that the rifle had gone off until I saw him drop . . . and when I laid my hand on him to lift him up, I found that he was dead. Ugh! Then I hid him in a hole in the ice, and, because he had been my friend, I thought he would lie quiet forever there and never tell."

While these words had been in the saying, Granger had drawn nearer and nearer, so that now the two men stood face to face, almost touching, staring into one another's eyes. Who was this friend who had been shot? Could it have been Mordaunt? He seized hold of Spurling by the throat with both hands, and shook him violently, crying, "What was her name? Will you tell me that?"

Spurling wrenched himself free and his eyes blazed threateningly. "It wasn't a woman," he said; "thank God, I haven't sunk to that." Then more slowly, gazing fixedly on Granger as if to calculate how far it was safe to confide, "and he wasn't a friend of yours," he added.

Granger turned away from the window that the murderer might not see his countenance; his lips moved as if he prayed. He passed his hand before his eyes as a man does who has been temporarily blinded by a sudden flash. He had become terribly aware how near he had been to committing the crime for which this man was hunted. The knowledge of that fact gave him sympathy, a lack of which is always based on ignorance. The compassionate man is invariably one who has been greatly tempted. In those few seconds whilst he withdrew himself, the whole portentous problem was argued out, "By how much is this man who intends, better than that man who accomplishes his crime?" He concluded that the difference was not one of virtue, but only of opportunity — which entailed no credit on himself. He had passed through Spurling's temptation scatheless, therefore he could afford him tenderness.

"Druce," he said, speaking tremblingly, "it is terrible how far two men can drift apart in the passage of three short years."

"Then why did you leave me?" asked Spurling sulkily, not yet reassured of his safety, nor recovered from his rough usage.

"I left you because I feared that I might do the deed for which you are now in flight."

Spurling sat up astonished. "Lord!" he exclaimed, "have all men felt like that? I've often wondered why it was that you went away that night, leaving no message and abandoning your claim. Pray, who were you fearful of murdering?"

"Listen. If I tell you, it may make it easier for you to believe me, in spite of what has just happened, when I say that I sincerely want to help you."

He was interrupted. "I suppose you know," said Spurling with a shocking attempt at merriment, "that you are losing the thousand dollars which has been offered for my capture alive or dead? It's only fair to tell you that. If any man is to make a profit by my hanging, I'd rather that the man should be a friend."

It was as though one should make an indecent jest in the presence of a woman newly dead.

"I deserved that you should say that," Granger replied. "But listen to me this once, for we may never meet again; who knows, in this land of death? I want to explain to you how it was that I behaved as I did, and to ask your forgiveness."

"Then make haste," said Spurling, as he drew his chair nearer the window, and returned his gaze to the west.

Without the dark was falling, though the sky was still faintly stained with red. It was thus he sat in the unlighted room as they talked together through the night, a shadowy outline against the misty panes which never stirred, but stared far away across the frozen quiet of the land.

Granger spoke again. "You know with what hopes we set out on our journey to Dawson; how we went there not for the greed of gold, but for the sake of that other and more secret adventure which, as a boy, I promised my father I would undertake when I grew to be a man — an adventure which the Yukon gold could make possible and could purchase. That was my frame of mind throughout all the time that we were poor up there. That first winter in the Klondike, when we were nearly starved, and our money gave out because our grub was exhausted and the price of provisions ran so high, when we were thankful to work for almost any

wages on Wrath's diggings if only we might get food and keep warm, we still kept our faith in one another and our purpose in sight. You'll remember how we used to talk together throughout those long dark days when, from November to February, we scarcely ever saw the sun and the thermometer sometimes stood at fifty below, and how we would plan for our great expedition to El Dorado, when our fortunes should be made, comforting ourselves for our present privations with thoughts of the land which Raleigh described. Those, despite their misery, were my best days — I had hope then. Little Mordaunt would sit beside us, with his face in his hands and his eyes opened wide with wonder, listening to what we said; when we had finished he would beg us to take him also, offering as his share, if he should be first to make his pile, to pay the way for all of us. It was then that we three made the compact which should be binding, that whenever our joint fortunes, whether owned by one alone, or two, or in equal proportions by all together, should amount to fifty thousand dollars, we would regard it as common to us all, and, throwing up our workings, would leave the Yukon for Guiana, in search of El Dorado. We were good comrades then, and did not calculate what ruin the avarice of gain may bring about in men.

"When spring came, we set out to seek the gold which should redeem us, which lay just underground. All that summer we travelled and found only pay-dirt or colours, and at times not even that, till we came to the Sleeping River and pitched our camp at what was afterwards Drunkman's Shallows. How discouraged we were! We talked of turning back, saying that nothing of worth had ever been found in the Sleeping River.

We called ourselves fools for having wasted our time up there. Then, on what we had determined should be the last night of our camp, when we had made up our minds to return next day, Eric Petersen came by and joined us. He also had found nothing; worse still, had spent all he had, and, being down in the mouth, got drunk — not decently, but gloriously intoxicated. Somewhere about midnight, when, after twenty hours of shining, the sun had disappeared and the world was still bright as day, and we were all sleeping, he got up and went down to the river to bathe his aching head, and stumbled on the banks and, falling in, was nearly drowned. You heard him cry and, waking, ran down to the water's edge. As you stooped to pull him out, you saw that, where his foot had stumbled on the bank, it had kicked up a nugget. Then you roused us and, when we had prospected and found that gold was really there, we each staked a claim, and you an extra one as discoverer, and set off that same night on the run to register.

"It was on the evening of the day we recorded that you had your great time at the Mascot, leading the singing, and being toasted all round. It seemed to me I had reached El Dorado that night, — and now I know that I never shall. So, after the fun was over, we went back to work our claims, and toiled day and night till the river froze up. The stampede had followed us, and every yard of likely land was staked for miles below and above. My claim yielded next to nothing, and Mordaunt's soon pinched out; but your two were the richest on the Shallows.

"I was soon compelled to work for you for wages. Mordaunt, when he had taken ten thousand dollars

out of his claim, agreed to do likewise. We should both have left you at that time and gone away to prospect afresh, had it not been for our early understanding that whatever we earned was owned conjointly. Just before the winter closed down upon us, we had taken out nearly fifty thousand dollars, the figure at which we had agreed to quit the Yukon; I had one, Mordaunt ten, and you had thirty-five thousand dollars — forty-six thousand in all. Mordaunt and I talked to you about selling out and starting on our greater quest, but you held us to the fifty-thousand limit, saying that six months' postponement more or less would make no difference, and that we had better have too much than too little capital in hand before our start was made. We yielded to your judgment inasmuch as you were the richest man, never suspecting that you were already contemplating going back on your bargain to share and share alike with us.

"But after the burning had commenced, and the winter had settled down for good, and the days had grown short and gloomy, we noticed a change in your manner — one of which you, perhaps, were not fully conscious. Your conversation became masterful and abrupt; you made us feel that we were your hired men, and were no longer partners in a future and nobler enterprise. Gradually the certainty dawned upon us that you had repudiated your compact, and did not include us in your plans. Gold for its own sake I had never cared about as you had; I only valued it for the power it had to forward me in the quest of which I had dreamed since I was a child — the following in my father's footsteps and discovering of the city of the Incas, and, perhaps, of my father himself.

"When I had seen you growing rich whilst I remained a poor man, I had felt no jealousy; for I trusted in the promise we had exchanged and relied on your honesty in keeping your word. But, when I had perceived your new intention, something went wrong inside my brain, so that I began to construe all your former good as bad. I thought that from the first you had never intended to keep your word, and had brought me into the Klondike to get me out of the way, so that, possessed of the secret information which I had given you, you might steal a march on me, and set out for El Dorado by yourself. Whether that was your purpose I do not know; but, for doubting you, you can scarcely blame me. So, day by day, as I descended the shaft to the bed-rock, and piled up billets of wood, and kindled them, throwing out the muck, drifting with the streak, sending up nuggets to the surface, and dirt which often averaged ten dollars to the pan, I said to myself, 'Every shovelful you dig out, and every fire you light, and every billet you stack, is helping Spurling to betray you the earlier.'

"At first I would not believe my own judgment, but drove my anger down by replying, 'He is no traitor; he is my friend.' But at night when I came up, and you spoke to me pityingly about my hard luck and your own increasing wealth, I knew what you meant. Mordaunt didn't seem to mind; he had ten thousand dollars of his own, so he only said, 'Give him time. He's all right. He'll remember and come round. His head's turned for the moment by his fortune and he's lost his standards of what is just. I daresay if this happened to you or me, we should have been as bad.'

"But that did not comfort me much, for I thought,

'A man who can betray and lie to you once, can always lie and betray.' I could not sleep at night for thinking about it and I brooded over it all the day; there was ever before my eyes the vision of you, sailing up the Great Amana without me.

"If nothing else had happened and it had remained at that, I suppose I should have finished my winter's contract with you and have gone out again in the spring, either with Mordaunt or alone, prospecting for myself. As it was, I began to argue with myself. 'What better right has Spurling to this gold than I?' I said. 'If I had chosen this claim, as I might have done, all the wealth which is now his would have been mine. Had that been the case, I should have held to my bargain and have dealt squarely by him. Since he refuses to allow me the share which he promised me, I have a right to take it.'

"You know what followed, how I hid some nuggets in my shirt, and you accused me and discovered them. You called me a thief, and threatened to expose me to the law of the mining camp. I told you that, since we had made that agreement to share conjointly whatever we found, I had as big a right to take charge of some of the gold as you yourself. Then you laughed in my face and struck me, asking if that was the usual way in which a labourer spoke to his employer. That blow drove me mad. I made no reply, for I had become suddenly crafty; I awaited a revenge that was certain and from which there could be no rebound. From that day forward the lust to kill was upon me; wherever I looked I saw you dead, and was glad. When the Northern Lights shot up they seemed to me, instead of green or yellow, to be always crimson, the blood-

colour. When they crept and rustled through the snow along the mountain heights, I fancied that they were a band of murderers who fled from their crime, and turned, and beckoned, and pointed to me, and whispered 'Come.' As my imagination wrought within me I grew silent; not even Mordaunt could rouse me. But he guessed what was happening, and would often come to me and say, 'Don't get down-hearted. Whatever Spurling does, I still hold to my promise. You and I are partners with a common fund. We have eleven thousand dollars already, so cheer up.'

"But it wasn't envy of your wealth had driven me mad; it was fear lest you should go off and leave me behind, and should get to Guiana and to El Dorado first. I couldn't shake off my hallucination however much I tried — which wasn't much; always and everywhere I could see you dead. You know that the Klondike with its few hours of winter daylight, its interminable nights, its pale-green moon which seems to shine forever in a steely cloudless sky, and its three long months when men rarely see the sun, is not a much better place than Keewatin in which to heal a crippled mind. So, with the passage of time, there was worse to come.

"One morning as I came to the shaft, I found a stranger waiting there. It was dark, I could not see his face; since he said nothing, I passed him and, descending to the bed-rock, commenced to scatter the last night's burning that I might get at the thawed-out muck. Presently I heard the sound of someone following, and the creak of the rope as he let himself down in the bucket. I thought it was you, so I did not turn, but sulkily went on with my work. The footsteps came after me wherever I went, standing behind me. At

last I swung round in anger, supposing that you had come to torment me; at that moment I had it in my heart to strike you dead. In the light of the scattered fire, I discovered that it was not you, but instead a man of about my height and breadth. 'What d'you want?' I asked him. He did not answer. 'Who sent you here?' I said. He was silent. Then I grew frightened; seizing a smouldering brand, having puffed it to a blaze, I thrust it before his face — and saw *myself*.

"I was down there all alone and underground; no one could have heard me had I cried for help. In my terror I grew foolish and laughed aloud; *it seemed to me so odd that I should have such fear of myself*. When I had grown quiet, 'Who sent you here?' I asked again.

" At last he answered, 'You called me.'

"'What have you come for?' I questioned.

"'To murder Spurling,' he replied.

"Then in a choking whisper I muttered, 'Who are you?'

"And he answered me, 'Your baser self.'

"I looked for a way of escape, but he stood between me and the mouth of the shaft; to get out I would have had to pass him. I tried to make him speak with me again that I might draw him aside, and so might slip past him and get above ground; but he refused to stir. Then I grew fascinated, and went near him, and peered into his face. He was like me, yet unlike; he was more evil — what I might become at my worst. He was to me what you were, when you just now arrived, to the man whom I loved in London, and who saved my life in Tagish Lake. Having studied his body and his face I loathed him, and drew myself away to the farthest

hiding-place. There I crouched beside the gold streak for ten hours until the last glow of fire had died out, and I was left in darkness. Then, though I could not see him, I knew that he was there.

"At last Mordaunt came and called to me. I begged him to come down. Thinking I was wounded, he lit a lantern and descended in haste. As he approached, I looked to see where *myself* had been standing; but, though I had felt him there the moment before, directly Mordaunt came he vanished. In my horror I told Mordaunt everything — and what do you think the little fellow did? Instead of laughing at me, or fleeing from me for his life because I was mad, he set down his lamp and, throwing his arms about me, knelt down there on the bed-rock and prayed. If it hadn't been for Mordaunt I should certainly have killed you in the days which followed. Whenever I was alone or in your company, that thing, which was my baser self, was there. He would stand behind you, so that you could not see him, with his hand upraised as if about to strike. He would beckon to me that I also should get behind you, and when you spoke to me contemptuously or harshly the evil of his face would reflect a like passion in me against you. But whenever Mordaunt was present he vanished, and I had rest from temptation; therefore I say that Mordaunt saved you.

"I kept on hoping that when spring came I would be able to leave, and thus rid myself of my evil dread; but the longer I stayed the greater grew my peril. At length the crisis came.

"You had been down river across the ice to Dawson on the spree and to arrange for the carriage of your bullion to Seattle. It was night, and I was just return-

ing from the shaft, where I had been giving a last look to the burning. I had a rifle in my hand, and, as I arrived at the door of the cabin, raising my eyes, saw you coming up-stream with your dogs, with your head bent low as if you were tired. Also I saw in the moonlight that *that other* was noiselessly following you, stride by stride, stealing up behind. I saw him waving his arms to me, gesticulating madly and signing to me to kneel down and fire.

"Suddenly all power of resistance left me; with my eyes upon his face, the memory of all the wrongs which you had dealt me, and my hatred of you, swam uppermost in my mind. I knelt down in the snow to take steadier aim and had my finger on the trigger, when the gun was snatched from behind. I turned fiercely round and found Mordaunt standing there. 'Quick,' he said, 'come inside.' He thrust the rifle beneath a pile of furs, and bade me tumble into my bunk and pretend sleep. Shortly after, I heard you come in and say that one of your dogs had been shot dead; but I did not stir. You came over and gazed down suspiciously at me, but seemed satisfied with Mordaunt's account of how I had been lying there for the past two hours wearied out with the day's work. Next day I could not look you in the eyes; also the memory of a woman I had loved had come suddenly back and changed me, making me ashamed. So two nights later I gathered together the few things I had and, abandoning my claim, fled.

"If I could not trust myself with you, I could not trust myself in the Yukon. Every miner travelling with gold seemed to me a possible victim for my crime. I went about in fear lest I should see that evil thing, which called himself *myself*, returning to keep me company

through life. I fled to escape him and, hoping to leave him behind me in the Klondike, went over the winter trail to Skaguay, the route by which two years earlier we had fought our way up, took steamer to Vancouver and came on thence to Winnipeg. My money was all but exhausted when I got there, I was broken in spirit and at my wit's end. By chance I met with Wrath, on whose claim in our first winter we had worked. He had gone back to his independent trading, and, at my request for employment, sent me up here to look after his interests at Murder Point. I was glad to come; after my experience on the Sleeping River, I was distrustful of myself in the company of men, never knowing when that *foreshadowing of my evil desires* might not return to hound me on to fresh villainies and despair. For one who wished to be alone, Heaven knows, I chose well. You're not burdened with too much society in Keewatin — that isn't the complaint which is most often heard."

Outside the night had long since settled down — a night which with snow and starlight was not dark, but shadowy and ghostlike, making the interval between two days a long-protracted dusk beneath which it was possible to see for miles. Far away in the forest a timber-wolf howled dismally; the huskies in the river-bed, seated on their haunches, lifted up their heads and echoed his complaint. Then all was still again, nothing was audible except the occasional low booming of the ice, when a crack rent its path across the surface and far below the river shook its gyves, as though clapping its hands in expectation of the freedom of the spring to come.

Against the window the silhouette of Spurling loomed

up, with the drifting dimness of the starlight for background, and the square of surrounding darkness for a frame of sombre plush; he seemed a man-portrait whom some painter had condemned forever to motionlessness and silence with the magic of his brush, and had nailed on a stretcher, and had hung up for ornament.

At last he turned his head and stared into the blackness of the room, searching with his eyes for Granger. "So the deed which you feared to do, I have done," he said. "And here we sit together again, now that three years have passed; I, the man whom you hoped to murder and the man who has committed your crime; you, the man who stole from me, fired on me, missed aim, and ran away, and yet who at this present time are my judge. It is very strange! One would have supposed that with the breadth of a continent between us, you in Keewatin, I in Yukon, we need never have met. There is a meaning in this happening; God intends that you should help me to escape."

CHAPTER IV

SPURLING'S TALE

GRANGER from his place beside the red-hot stove said nothing, but bowed his head. Spurling saw his action through the darkness and took courage.

"There is not much to tell," he said. "After you left us, my luck seemed to vanish. My great bonanza pinched out, as Mordaunt's had done. I spent the spring and summer in washing out the gold from my winter's dump, and in sinking shafts to locate another streak which I might follow in the winter to come. I found none, but at first I did not lose confidence. I had plenty of capital and could well afford to spend some of it in exploration. I was quite sure that my two claims contained a hundred times as much gold as I had taken out — all I had to do was to find its location.

"What Mordaunt said to you about me was true — my sudden good fortune had turned my head; I flung my earnings right and left, spending them on the most foolish extravagances, and still remained avaricious. I developed a mania for asserting my power and getting myself talked about. You know that in those days a new 'millionaire' in the Klondike was expected to do some of that; if, when he came to Dawson, he was sparing, and refused to treat the town to half-dollar drinks till everyone was drunk, they'd take him by his legs and arms and batter him against a wall until he

gave in and cried, 'Yes.' Why, I've seen men set to and pan out from the sawdust on the floor of a saloon the gold which I had scattered. I performed such follies as made Swiftwater Bill famous when, after he had squabbled with his 'lady-friend,' and he saw her ordering eggs, of which she happened to be fond, he bought up every egg in town at a dollar a piece, nine hundred in all, and smashed them, to spite her, against the side of her house. I was a confounded fool; if I hadn't been, I shouldn't have quarrelled with you, and we shouldn't have been here now — we might have been in El Dorado, perhaps.

"Well, when I'd blown a good part of my money over stupidities for which I scarcely received even pleasure in return, I awoke to the fact that my workings had ceased to bear. Already the Sleeping River had got a bad name and was deserted; it was a commonplace that 'Drunkman's Shallows was played out.' I wouldn't acknowledge it. I took pride in the Shallows because I had discovered them; I wasted the remainder of my money in buying up other men's useless claims, and in engaging men to work them. Towards the end, even I had to own to myself that the streaks had pinched out and the Shallows were barren; but out of desperate bravado I kept on until my money was at an end. Then, when I was clean broke, I chose out a partner and went prospecting once again.

"At first we found nothing, for, as I say, when you left me my luck departed. For months we wandered, finding only pay and colours, till we entered the Squaw River and discovered what we wanted at Gold Bug Bend. We stayed there working and testing the dirt till well into January; then one day we drifted into a

streak which panned out twenty dollars to the pan, and so we knew at last that we had struck it. We eyed one another suspiciously, for we each of us remembered how you had been treated, and we began to talk about the necessity of recording our claims and discovery. Neither of us would trust the other to go alone, for we both wanted the claim on which we had been working, where the rich streak had been located, so we set out together. At first we travelled leisurely, speaking to one another; but soon we grew silent, and began to race. My partner was a lighter built man than I, and had the better team of dogs, and carried no gun. Very soon he began to draw away from me; but I relied on my superior strength to catch him up, for the journey was long. Then, somehow, as he ran farther and farther ahead, the belief grew up within me, that, whatever I might do, God meant him to get there first as a punishment to me for what I had done to you. At that thought all my lust after power, and the memory of the mastery which I had lost, came back, and I said, 'I will outwit God this time, however.'

"Mechanically, almost without thinking, I levelled my gun and fired — and saw my partner drop. When I came up with him, he was lying face-downwards, with his arms stretched out before him along the ground. I turned him over and called on him to rouse. I kicked him with the toe of my snowshoe, and tried to get angry, pretending to myself that he was shamming. Then I knelt down beside him and covered him with a robe, deceiving myself that he had fainted and would presently awake. After I had waited for what seemed to be ages, I called him by name, and, when he did not stir, I laid my finger on his eyeballs — and so I knew

that he was dead. When I knew that, fear got hold upon me; at every crack of the ice I persuaded myself that someone was coming up or down the frozen river, or had already seen me, and lay hidden behind a snow-ridge, watching all my doings. So I took up my comrade, and thrust him upright into a hole in the ice, trusting that because he had been my friend he would understand, and never tell. But his arms, which he had extended in falling, stuck out above the surface, as if signing my secret to all the world. They had grown stiff and frozen, and I could not bend them, so I knocked off, and piled up around and above them, blocks of ice.

"Then, because I was fearful lest my coming alone without my partner into Dawson to record a claim might arouse suspicion, I turned back to the Gold Bug Bend. There I stayed and drifted with the streak for three months, and thawed out at least sixty thousand dollars' worth of muck. I had time to think things over. I came to the conclusion that I could not record my claim, since that might bring the miners up who would notice that my partner was missing; neither could I take down my dust to Dawson to express it to the outside, since that also would lead to questions being asked as to where I'd got it, seeing that it was so great in amount. So I determined to lie quiet until the summer time, and then to wash out only so much gold as I could carry about myself.

"There was little chance of my being discovered on the Squaw River, for it is seldom travelled, and I calculated that in four months' time when the spring had come, the river would float the body far away to where it never would be found, or if found, then at a time when it would be unrecognisable. But in my first calculation I had not

reckoned with my loneliness, and the horror which comes of knowledge of hidden crime. By the end of March I could stand it no longer and set out for Dawson, where there were men in whose company I could forget.

"Soon after I got there the winter broke up and, by the first of May, though the Klondike itself was still frozen solid to its river-bed, the snow and ice from the country and rivers to the south, which had been exposed to the rays of the sun, had thawed and, draining into it, had created a shallow torrent which, running between the banks above the ground-ice, gave an appearance of the Klondike in full flood. Very soon the water overflowed, so that houses were deluged and men had to take to boats and the roofs of their cabins for safety; it looked as though Dawson would be washed away. The drifting ice commenced to pack and pile against the bridge above the town; unless the jam could be broken before the ground-ice loosened, the bridge must collapse. Some men volunteered to blow it up with dynamite. In so doing they caused the ground-ice to tear itself free from the bottom so that, the water getting underneath, it floated up and pressed the pack against the floor of the bridge, forming, for a half-minute, an impassable barrier against the torrent rushing down. The flood rose behind it like a tidal wave, tossing on its crest a gigantic floe, standing waist-deep in which I saw, for the second during which it flashed in the sun, a frozen man, whom I recognised, who gazed upright towards me with his arms upstretched —only for a second, then the bridge went down and the water leapt over it, driving timbers, and floe, and man below the surface, carrying them northwards passed the city, out of sight.

"The thing had been so sudden that only a few of those who were watching had realised what had happened; of these still fewer had seen the man; and of these only one had known and recognised my partner, as I had done. None of them could say for certain whether the man they had seen upon the floe had been alive or dead. In the confusion which followed the catastrophe this rumour was at first regarded as an idle tale to which no one paid much attention. But, when that one man who had seen and recognised came to me and inquired as to my partner's whereabouts, and I could give him no satisfactory answers, curiosity was aroused.

"The Mounted Police instituted a search for the body, but as yet it was not found.

"I was half-minded to leave the country and go outside. Would to God I had! But I was afraid that such conduct, following immediately upon this occurrence, would attract attention. I returned to the Squaw River and spent the half of another year up there. Then one day in November an Indian, who was passing up-river, stepped into my cabin and told me that the Mounted Police were searching for me. When I asked him why, he said that the English friends of my partner had been inquiring for him, and that I was known to have been the last man to be seen in his company. When that had been said, I knew the meaning of the sight I had witnessed when the bridge gave — my partner had sent his body down river on the first of the flood to warn me of my danger, as if he would say, '*Escape while you can; it will soon be discovered.*'

"I gathered together what gold I could carry and, travelling by night only that I might not be noticed

(and you know how long November nights can be in the Yukon), I struck the trail for Skaguay — the route by which two and a half years before you had fled. I got out undetected, as I thought, and arrived at Vancouver. There I read in a paper that at Forty-Mile the body had been found. I was seized with panic and hurried on to Winnipeg; on the way I was alarmed to find that I was being shadowed. I escaped my follower on my arrival there and sought out Wrath, the only man I knew in town. I was sure that I could trust him if he were sufficiently heavily bribed; so I gave him all the gold I had, and told him the truth, and offered to furnish him with such information as would enable him to go up and stake the rich bonanza which I had left behind on the Squaw River — all this if he would only help me to escape. He agreed to accept my terms, despite the risks he was taking in helping to conceal a criminal. He told me that you were up here, and said that it was no good going East, or striking down to the States, since all the railroads would be watched, and that my only chance lay in making a dash due north for Keewatin. He gave me a guide for the first three hundred miles of the journey, and the swiftest team of huskies he had. He smuggled me out to Selkirk, and gave me introductions to such men as could be trusted on the way. Before I left, I heard that they had made me an outlaw by placing a thousand dollars on my head.

"I've travelled day and night since then, only halting when my strength gave out, or when I had to hide till darkness came that I might pass unobserved by a Company's outpost.

"And I'm followed; I know that. I have not seen him, but I can feel that he is drawing nearer, and now

is not far behind. I knew that if I could reach you, in spite of what has happened between us, you would save me. Granger, you must save me, if not for the sake of what I am, then because of what I once was to you in our London days. I know that I've deteriorated and have become bad; but it was more the fault of the country than of the man. You know what happens to a fellow who lives up there, how greedy and gloomy he gets, always feeling that the gold is underground and that he must get to it even at the expense of his honour and his life. You've felt it, you came near doing what I have done. If Mordaunt hadn't stopped you, you would have stood where I now stand."

Granger broke in upon the frenzy of his appeal, asking abruptly, "Where is Mordaunt now?"

If his face had not been in the shadow, Granger would have seen how Spurling's lips tightened as to withstand sudden pain, and his body shuddered at that question. "Oh, Mordaunt is all right," he said. "He left the Yukon soon after you left — he said that the fun was spoilt without you. I daresay he's seeking for El Dorado or else is married."

"You are sure of that?" asked Granger.

"Sure of what? All I know is that he quarrelled with me over your affair because he thought that I had not used you justly; shortly afterwards we broke up our partnership, and I was told that he had gone out through Alaska, via Michael to Seattle."

When the man at the back of the room said nothing, Spurling asked in a tone of horror, "Why, you don't think that I killed him too, do you, — just because I have owned to shooting one man?"

"I don't know what to think," replied Granger,

speaking slowly; "no, certainly I do not think that you killed him, *too*."

"Then, what?"

"Never mind, since the matter's in doubt I will help you. What do you propose to do?"

"Go on till I come to the Forbidden River, and hide there till the hunt for me is over, and they think that I am dead."

"And then, if you survive?"

"Creep back into the world and begin life all afresh."

"And how can I help you?"

"By lending me a fresh team, for mine is all tired out, and giving me provisions for my journey, and delaying my pursuer when he arrives."

"How shall I delay him!"

"Oh, you will know when you see him — there are many ways, some of which are very effectual." Spurling played with the butt of his revolver as he said these words, and looked at Granger tentatively, then looked aside. "For instance, the winter is breaking up and he might fall through the ice; or while he is staying here several of his dogs might die; or, at the least, you can tell him that you have not seen me and persuade him that he has passed me by. If he refuses to believe that, you can suggest that I have left the river and gone into the forest, and so put him off my track — anything to give me time."

"He would scarcely believe the last," said Granger, "for on the Last Chance there is only one trail — by the river up and down. And I want you to understand Spurling, that if I do help you it will be by clean means; I intend to play fair all round."

"Play fair! Do you call it fair play when a nation

sets out to hunt one man? I have only done what thousands have thought and intended. What better is the man who effects my capture, and gets the thousand dollars which they have set upon my head, and sends me to the scaffold, than I myself who without premeditation shot a man. You're a nice one to talk about playing fair to the fellow who gave you your chance, and was your friend, and whom you tried to murder! Which of us, do you suppose, is the cleaner man?"

Granger did not answer; through the last few hours he had been asking himself that same question. Spurling, thinking he had offended, began to plead afresh. "Oh, John, if you knew all that I have suffered you would pity me. God knows I've repented for what I did with drops of blood. If I'd only thought before I acted, I might have known that I stood to gain nothing by it. What good was the gold to me when I got it? I could only hide it, and wealth is not wealth when you have to keep it secret to yourself."

He paused exhausted, and fell back drooping in his chair. Granger's pity had been aroused. "Druce," he said, "I have promised that I will help you; you must be content with that."

Spurling clutched at his hand and pressed it to his lips. "And there are things which you need not tell him?" he questioned. "Say that there are things that you will not tell."

"There are things that I will not tell," Granger repeated. "I will not tell him that I have seen you, and will refuse to give him help."

Spurling's eyes had again sought out the west and the intervening stretch of sky, where from the east the reflected light of dawn had already begun to spread.

"I don't like the look of it," he muttered; "I can feel that he is not far behind. Every time I look up-river I expect to see him, a dull brown shadow, hurrying down between the banks of white. I must be going; while I stay I cannot rest."

So, when all had been got ready and Granger had supplied him with a new outfit and an untired team of dogs, he accompanied him out on to the Point where the dawn was breaking. Then he told him of a cache which Beorn had made at the mouth of the Forbidden River, which he might open, and from which he could get supplies if his own ran short. He went with him a mile down the ice, that he might guide him round a part of the trail which was rotten and unsafe to travel. At parting, Spurling grasped his hand; pointing back to the danger spot he whispered, "That is one of the things which you need not tell." Before he could answer him, he had lashed up his dogs and was on his way northwards. It was then that the thought of a final test flashed through Granger's mind. "Spurling, Spurling," he called, "did you know that Mordaunt was a woman and not a man?"

Whether he had heard Granger could not tell, for he did not halt or turn his head; driving yet more furiously, urging his huskies forward with the whip and shouting them on, he vanished round the bend.

Granger stood gazing after him, listening to the last faint echo of his cries; then he turned slowly and walked through the half-light back to his lonely store. Over to his right, above the horizon the red sun leapt. He did not raise his eyes; but, as he walked, he whispered over and over to himself words which seemed incredible, "And, if it had not been for her, *I* should have been like that."

CHAPTER V

CITIES OUT OF SIGHT

In Keewatin the human intellect stands forever at a halt, awed in the presence of a limitless serenity for which it can find no better name than God, since, of all things which are incalculable, He seems most infinite.

In this land of rivers and solitude Man is unnecessary, disregarded, and plays no part; if, after two hundred odd years of white, and many centuries of Indian habitation, Man were to withdraw himself to-morrow, he would leave no permanent record of his sojourn there — only a few outposts and forts, several far-scattered independent traders' stores, one or two missions and fishing-stations, all of them built of wood, which within a decade would have crumbled to decay, over which the tangled forest would silently close up. Instinctively he knows himself for an impudent intruder on something which is sacred; he hears continually what Adam heard when he stole of the fruit which was forbidden, God walking in the garden in the cool of the day — the accusing footsteps of God. His brain is staggered by an unchartered immensity in which he has no portion, which he can only watch. His individual worth to the universe is dwarfed by the imminence of the All: so nothing seems very serious which is only personal and, since all things which we apprehend must become in some sense personal, nothing is very important.

The procession of human effort becomes a spectacle at sight of which Homeric laughter may sometimes be permissible, but tears never. If a man once gives way to weeping in Keewatin, he will weep always. Only by the exercise of a self-restraint which at first seems brutal can life be endured there.

Granger, as he walked toward his store under the shadow of the dawn, was conscious of all this. The land was wrapped in the intensest quiet; the very crunch of his snowshoes seemed a profanation, though he trod lightly. When he had ascended the Point, he paused and gazed back. Already the thaw had commenced; down the still white face of the country, which lay at his feet like a shrouded corpse, the tears had begun to trinkle, though the eyes were tranquil and fast shut; the sight was as astounding to him as if a man six months dead should be seen to stir within his coffin of glass. Here and there in the expanse of forest he could see flashes of green and brown, of tree-tops from which the snow had fallen. The river-banks, which yesterday had seemed chiselled out of solid marble, were to-day tunnelled and scarred with tiny rills and watercourses which groped their way feebly riverwards. As he stood in silence meditating, he was startled by the whirr of wings, and looking southward descried the advance-guard of the first flock of ducks. "Ha, the spring has come," he cried; but immediately he checked his ecstasy, for his eyes had again caught sight of the emotionless expression on that great white face with its closed eyes turned toward the sun. Though no voice spoke it seemed to him to say, making by its silence its meaning plain, "There is nothing of which the importance is so great that we should forsake our calm."

He felt rebuked for vulgarity, as though he had been found shouting in a cathedral-nave where priests were praying for the peace of souls of the departed. He desired to hide himself; entering his shack, he pushed to the door. He was tired; his brain ached with thought, and his thought was disjointed. He could not believe that Spurling had ever come; it was all an hallucination. Thinking about the past had made him imagine all that, or else he had dreamed it in the night. He went over detail by detail all that had seemed to him to happen; and even then, when it fitted reasonably together, he could not be certain. It was too monstrous that Spurling should have become like that! He would not believe it. Then his anxiety for Mordaunt sprang up and commenced to craze him. The terrible question throbbed through his mind, "Is Mordaunt dead?"

The mania for questions grew upon him. Three separate voices spoke clamorously at once: "Is Mordaunt dead?"

"Did Spurling murder him?"

"Am I mad?"

He stumbled to the far end of the room and flung himself down in his bunk, burying his face in its coverings that he might shut out the light and gain a moment's rest. But his imaginings followed and knelt beside him.

"Well, if I must think," he whispered, "I will think of that which is best." He beckoned from out the shadows his memory of Mordaunt's face, and gave himself over to recalling all that it once had meant. They had nicknamed him "The Girl" because of his shyness and modesty, and had not always been particular in the jokes which they had made at his expense. Yes, and he had had a woman's ways from first to last.

Nothing that had happened had been able to coarsen him; he had never given way to loose talk or brutal jests, and in the presence of suffering had invariably been full of tenderness.

Good heavens! pass on to the crisis — to that day when he had come to the top of the shaft and called down to him! He had answered his call, praying him in an agonized voice to descend and rescue him. He could see him now approaching hurriedly, yet cautiously, through the darkness, lifting high up his swinging lamp so that its rays fell across his face. He could still remember how absurd it had seemed to suppose that a creature, so small and fragile, could save him from *that other*. Yet he had; and after that, because of the relief he felt, he had confessed. Then, in a moment of compassionate self-forgetfulness, Mordaunt had placed his arms about him and had drawn down his head upon his breast — an action of which no man in dealing with another man was ever capable; the mother-instinct was manifested there. In the flickering lamplight, with his head pressed close to his companion's breast, feeling its rise and fall at each struggling intake of the breath, crouching underground upon the bed-rock, he had guessed the secret — *that Mordaunt was not a man.* From that hour he had loved her. She had never known that he shared her secret. Thank God, he had remained so much a gentleman that he had not told her that! Who she was, why she had come to the Klondike, what was her proper name, he had not permitted himself to inquire; for him it had been sufficient that she was a woman, and that he loved her, and that he was unworthy of her love. After she had seen him shoot at Spurling he had avoided her, lest by contact with him she should

be defiled. He had vaguely hoped at the time of leaving that the day might come, after he had cleansed himself and proved himself a man, when he might seek her out and ask her to be his wife. Through the last three years he had lived for that. To have asked her then would have been an insult, an act of cowardice. How would an upright woman answer a man whom she had just saved from homicide? How would she regard a man who had discovered the secret of her sex in such a manner, because of her compassion, and had not had the decency to keep that knowledge secret even from herself? So he had fled from the Shallows for a double reason; that he might not do violence to Spurling, and that he might not betray himself to her. He had left her without a hint of his going, or a word of explanation.

What had she thought of him? He had often wondered that. Had she also loved him, and not dared to speak about it? He half-suspected that. If she had loved him and had spoken out, he would not have married her at that time, when even he despised himself; to have done so would have been to drag her down. Still, he could not help speculating as to what she had said and thought on that morning when she awoke in the winter dreariness, and, gazing round the cabin, found that he had vanished. Had she regretted him, and had she sometimes, when Spurling had become intolerable, gone aside and wept? After three years, though he had loved her, he could only recall her by her man's name, and picture her in her man's dress.

Then, while he thought with closed eyes, that awful question came again, "Is Mordaunt dead?"

Whilst she was in the world it had been possible for him to strive to be straightforward and courageous;

but, *if she was dead . . .* ! If Spurling had murdered her, if he had lied to him and *she* was his partner, what then? Well, that all depended on whether Spurling had known her sex. If not, what a revenge he would take when he should confront him, and inform him that he had murdered a woman, and not a man! He knew Spurling; for him the public ignominy of being hanged would be as nothing compared with such private knowledge — it would thrust him into Hell in this life.

Ah, but that could not be; God would not allow it! Spurling himself had said that he had not sunk so low as that. Yet, in case it might be so, he would keep his word and help him to escape — from the Mounted Police, but not from himself. He would be the executioner if there must be one. The law should not rob him of his revenge. He would save Spurling's life in case he might need to take it.

Then, unbidden and against his will, there rose up the image of the man who had saved his life in Tagish Lake. Spurling had forestalled him, bribed him beforehand, by restoring him his own life in exchange for the life which he was doomed to take. Did that not make amends? Also he had rescued Mordaunt from disaster on the Skaguay trail, where he would certainly have perished had he been left. He had done unconsciously that which Granger proposed to do of set purpose — saved a life that he might take it. Did not that in some measure make amends? The problem was too complicated; it must work itself out in its own way. Yet, it would be a bitter irony if, after he had travelled a continent to avoid this deed, he should be forced to kill Spurling in the end — Spurling, who had come to him of his own accord. Still more burlesque would it be

if, after Spurling was at rest, he should be hanged in his stead.

But perhaps Mordaunt was not dead.

To rid himself of these morbid questionings, he would give his remoter memory the reins to-day, at whatever cost; it was pleasanter to remember bygone unpleasantness than to live with the ills which threatened his present life. He recollected how some one had once asked Carlyle, "Why does the Past always seem so much happier than the Present?" And Carlyle's stern reply, "Because the fear has gone out of it." How odd it seemed to him that he should be recalling Carlyle up there in Keewatin! Yet, because that answer was true, he took up the thread of his London life again, that so, with the drug of memory, he might lay to rest his immediate misfortunes. He was a little boy again in the old red house on Clapton Common. One by one he entered its homely rooms with their ancient furniture, quaint wall-paper, and general look of substantial comfort. Once more he leant out of the bow-window at the back and gazed beyond the hill, upon which the house was built, up which gardens climbed, divided by creeper-covered walls of crumbling brick, down to where at its foot the river ran through flats and marshes. Far away, a little to the right, old Woodford raised its head; to the left Chingford, as yet unmodernized, showed up; and straight ahead, at a distance of seven miles, the steeple of High Beech, in the kindly habitable forest of Epping, was in sight. This was the house in which he had first dreamed the dream by the glamour of which he had been led astray. His father had dreamed the same dream, and his grandfather before him; it seemed to be a part of the walls and masonry, so interwoven

was it with his memories of that house. It had been the first faery-story which he had ever listened to, and had been told to him for the most part in that back room with the bow-window, as he had sat on his grandfather's knee on winters' nights.

The first time that he had heard it he could not have been more than five, and his father was absent, so his grandfather said, pursuing the dream on the other side of the world. This was the story as he remembered it. "In the land of Guiana there is a golden city named Manoa, but El Dorado in the Spanish language, which stands on the shores of a vast inland lake whose waters are salt, which is called Parima, and which is two hundred leagues in length. Juan Martinez was the first white man to visit it, and he did so through no fault of his own! When he was with the Spanish army at the port of Morequito, the store of powder, of which he had charge, caught fire and was destroyed. His commander, Diego Ordas, was so enraged that he sentenced him to death; but being appealed to by the soldiery with whom Martinez was a favourite, he commuted his punishment to this — that he should be set in a canoe alone, without any victual, only with his arms, and so turned loose on the great river. By the grace of God he floated down stream and was captured by certain Indians, who, never having seen a European before or anyone of that colour, carried him into a land to be wondered at, and so from town to town, until he came to the golden city of Manoa of which Inca was emperor. Now the emperor, when he beheld him, knew him to be a Christian, for not long since his brethren had been vanquished by the Spaniards in Peru; therefore he had him lodged in his palace and ordered that he should be respectfully

entertained. There Martinez lived for seven months, and all that while was not allowed to wander beyond the city's walls lest he should discover the country's secrets, for he had been brought thither blindfold and had been fifteen days in the passage. When, years later, he came to die, he confessed to a priest that he had entered Manoa at high noon and that then his captors had uncovered his eyes, and that he had travelled all that day till nightfall through its streets and all the next, from the rising to the setting of the sun, of so great extent was it, until he arrived at the palace. It was Martinez who had given to Manoa its name of El Dorado, because its roadways were paved with gold, and there was so great an abundance of that metal there that, before the emperor would carouse with his captains, all those who were to pledge him were stripped naked, and their bodies anointed with white balsam, over which through hollow canes was blown by slaves the dust of fine gold, so that when his guests sat down to drink with him, they glistened yellow in the sun like gilded statues.

"When Martinez had obtained his freedom and returned to Trinidad, and told his story, many other adventurers set out in quest of Manoa; but none so much as saw it save only Pedro de Urra. He, after incredible labours, at length arrived at a mountain peak whence, looking down, far away in the distance he could just descry the shining roofs of palaces and golden domes of Inca temples, wherein, he was told, were stored gold images of women and children more beautiful than God had yet wrought into flesh and blood. But his strength was spent and his troops were famished, also the Incas' armies were moving forward to check his advance; therefore he had to retreat, and to return to the sea-

coast, where he fretted away his life in dreaming of the splendours of which he had only just had sight. Fifty years later Berreo, governor of Trinidad, set out from Nuevo Reyno with seven hundred horse and slaves, and descended the Cassanar river, bound upon the same errand. What with fever and poisonous water he lost many of his men and cattle, so that, when he reached the Province of Amapaia, he had but one hundred and twenty soldiers left, and these were sick and dying; and so he also was forced to abandon his search. And this man Raleigh captured, and from him extorted his secrets, when he sailed to discover and conquer El Dorado for Queen Elizabeth, having in his company Jacob Whiddon, the English pirate, and George Gifford who was captain of the Lion's Whelp.

"All the way across the ocean they studied the records of the adventurers who had sought before them, till they had them all by memory; for they hoped to find those same wonders which Lopez says that Pizarro found in the first home of the Incas: 'A royal city where all the vessels of the emperor's house, table, and kitchen, were of gold and silver, and the meanest of silver and copper for strength and hardness of metal. He had in his wardrobe hollow statues of gold which seemed giants, and the figures in proportion and bigness of all the beasts, birds, trees, and herbs that earth produceth; and of all the fishes that the sea or waters of his kingdom breedeth. He had also ropes, budgets, chests, and troughs of gold and silver, heaps of billets of gold, that seemed wood marked out to burn. Finally, there was nothing in his country whereof he had not the counterfeit in gold. Yea, and they say, that the Incas had a garden of pleasure in an island near Puna, where

they went to recreate themselves when they would take the air of the sea, which had all kinds of garden-herbs, flowers, and trees of gold and silver, an invention and magnificence till then never seen. Besides all this, he had an infinite quantity of silver and gold unwrought in Cuzco.' The counterpart of all these marvels Raleigh hoped to find, when he had sailed up the Orinoco to its watershed.

"So, when he had gathered all the information which he could from Berreo, he departed and rowed up the river in the galego boat of the Lion's Whelp, till on the fourth day he dropped into the waters of the Great Amana. Up the Great Amana he travelled, always getting news of his city, always being told that it was farther inland. On the banks of this river grew diverse sorts of fruit good to eat, flowers and trees of such variety as were 'sufficient to make ten books of herbals.' And everywhere he saw multitudes of birds of all colours, some carnation, some crimson, some orange-tawny, purple, watchet, and of all other sorts, so that, as he himself has said, 'It was unto us a great good passing of the time to behold them, besides the relief we found in killing some store of them; and still as we rowed, the deer came down feeding by the water's side, as if they had been used to the keeper's call.'

"Lured on by these delights, he journeyed farther inland until at last he came to the first great silver mine; but here the Orinoco and all the other rivers had risen from four to five feet in height, so that it was not possible by the strength of man or with any boat whatsoever to row into the river against the stream. However, before his return, one day as it drew towards sunset, he had sight of a crystal mountain, which was

said to be studded with diamonds and precious stones, which shone afar off, the appearance of which was like to that of a white church tower of exceeding height. Over the summit rushed a mighty river, which touched no part of the mountainside, and fell with a great clamour as if a thousand bells were knocked together; so, though he did not find El Dorado, he was somewhat comforted by the marvel of this sight. Also, before he left he saw *El Madre del Oro*, the mother of gold, which proved that treasure lay not far underground."

So, hour after hour, and night after night, the old man had told his magic story of the search for El Dorado to the little boy. And sometimes he would vary it with other tales and legends of men who had gone upon quests equally wild; of Ponce de Leon, who had sought for the Bimini Isle, where arose a fountain whose waters could cause men to grow young again; of the Sieur D'Ottigny, who set sail for the Unknown in search of wealth, singing songs as if bound for a bridal feast; and of Vasseur, who first brought news of the distant Appalachian Mountains, whose slopes teem with precious metals and with gems beyond price. But always the narration would return to El Dorado on the shores of Parima. Then the little boy would ask, "But, Grandpa, is it true, or is it only a faery-tale? Was there ever such a city, and does it exist to-day?" Whereupon the old gentleman would grow very serious and would reply, "Certainly there is such a city, my dear; for when I was young I went in search of it, and your father is out there finding it to-day."

After which answer he would get out maps, and show the child the red lines, which were his own journeys, and the exact spot in the watershed of the Orinoco

where he believed the city to stand. Then they would reason about it together, bending low beneath the lamp, tracing out the various routes of past explorers, until his mother came in and, seeing what they were so busy about, carried him off to bed. At an early age he discovered that his mother approved neither of the grandfather's stories, nor of her husband's absence. She was often at pains to tell him that there was no such city, that the stories were all fables, and that his grandpapa had wasted his fortune and talents in its search. But the boy believed in the fables, for he liked to think of his father as sailing up the Great Amana, where the deer feed along the banks, until at last he came to the golden city where the men are like gilded statues. He was sure that his papa would return rich one day, bringing with him an Inca princess for his son to marry.

But, when his father did return, he brought back with him only a fever-shattered body for his wife to nurse, and a plucky belief that he would succeed next time. Ah, but those were good days which he had spent by his father's bedside, when he had gazed on that fair-haired, soldierly man who had trodden in Raleigh's footsteps! He remembered how his father had laughed when he had asked in awestruck tones whether he might be allowed to kiss his hands, and how he had said, "If I do not find, you will seek for it some day" — and then he had felt proud. How eagerly he had listened when the two explorers, father and son, had sat together and had talked over their various travels! And how he could remember his father's account of his latest journey! His mother had been out at the time when it was related; they never mentioned these matters in her presence because they pained her; moreover, if she was

near by when they were talked about, she would contrive some excuse for snatching the boy away. They had watched their opportunity, however, and his father had told him.

He had set out in a canvas sailing boat, and had ascended the Orinoco for twenty days. Every now and then he had come to rapids, where he had had to go ashore to carry his boat, or to marshes, where he had had to wade. As he travelled farther from the mainland, his Indian guides had deserted him till there was none left, and he had had to go on alone. Day by day he had passed by great rocks, on which there was writing engraved, which, perhaps, contained directions for travellers who, ages since, had been bound for that same city; but they were now of no use to him, because they were written in a forgotten language and in an alphabet which not even the Indians could understand. So he had gone on until at last he came to the crystal mountain, and the waterfall which Raleigh had described; and after that he had travelled further than even great Raleigh himself, or any other white man. It was at this point that the boy had gasped and asked to be allowed to kiss his father's hands.

Then his father had told him how beyond the mountain there had seemed to be nothing but tangled wood and swamp, and how he had caught fever and wandered on in delirium until, when he came to himself, he had found himself standing on the shores of what had once been a vast inland lake, but which had now become partially dry, through which it was only possible to wade. So he left his boat and waded on, sometimes shoulders high, for four days; for, though he was racked with pains, he would not give up because he believed the lake to be

Parima. On the evening of the fourth day, when his strength was almost spent and he was ready to sink with faintness, he came to an island and saw in the distance, in the light of the setting sun, golden spires and the roofs of houses many miles away, which he knew to be El Dorado. But by this time he had only two days' provisions left and dared not venture further; so he, like Pedro de Urra, having come within sight of his desire, had been compelled to turn back. Of his return journey he said nothing; Granger learnt that from his mother in later years. It had been made in agonies of hunger and thirst, which had nearly robbed him of his life. Nevertheless, his father had told him that, so soon as he got well again, he was going back, and that he would reach El Dorado this time. True to his word, when his fever had left him, he had bade them all good-bye, making his son secretly promise that, if he should not come back, when he became a man, he would follow him in the quest. Then had come the two years of anxious waiting in which they had had no news of him, and the final acceptance of the belief that he was dead. But his grandfather would not lose faith; he himself had once been missing for five years. He said that his son had reached the city, and was pushing homeward through the Andes on to the Pacific side. Night by night, in that back room with the bow-window, he had collected his records and studied them beneath the lamp. "He must be about here by now," he would say, pointing to a certain place. But the boy's mother had only smiled sadly, saying, "Is he not yet undeceived?" Then one evening they had left him in his chair, and had not heard him come up to bed, and in the morning had found him sitting stiff and silent in

the sunshine, with the map of Guiana spread out before him and his finger on the spot where he had written EL DORADO, the magic word.

The child had never forgotten that sight, its impression had sunk deep into his nature; somehow it had become symbolic for him of loyalty to one's chosen purpose in life As he had once asked permission to kiss his father's hands, so, when there was no one in the room to watch him, he had stolen up and smoothed his hands with reverence against the cushions of the chair where the old grey head had last rested — but he had never sat there After the old man's death, all things in that room became objects for his veneration. It was just this capacity in the small boy for hero-worship which his mother never tried to understand; so he kept his secret, and thus began the breach which was presently to widen. From that day Granger had pledged himself, when he should become a man, to go in search of his father and to inherit his quest; and to such a nature as Granger's that childish pledge was binding. He could never be persuaded that his father was dead; he always spoke and thought of him as a soldierly fair-haired man, living in a desirable land hard by a garden, like to that of the isle near Puna, which had herbs and flowers and trees of gold and silver, one who was an honoured guest in the emperor's house where the meanest utensils were of silver and copper for strength. At first, when only he and his mother were left, he had spoken to her of these fancies; but she had shown herself more and more averse to their mention, so he had learnt to keep his longings to himself.

His mother was a practical woman, born of a race of lawyers and diplomatists. Hence she coveted above

all things for her son, as she had done for his father before him, the certainties of life — social recognition and a banking-account; she had no sympathy with theories, however heroic, or with any kind of success which was not obvious and within hand-stretch. She was one of those safe people who always choose to-day's salary, if it be promptly paid, in preference to the more generous triumph of a to-morrow which may never come. She was wisely parsimonious in all things and, daring nothing herself, had no patience with natures which were more courageous. Much of her own money, and all of her husband's, had been spent by him in his fruitless explorations of Guiana. Now that he was gone, she discreetly invested what was left of her fortune, and deprived herself of all luxuries, so that when the time should come, her boy should have his chance in life unembarrassed by his father's previous reckless expenditures. She was proud of her son, for he was handsome; but she never realised that half a day of spoken love and sympathy can purchase more friendship than twenty years of benefits punctually and dutifully conferred — still less did she recognise the necessity for a mother consciously to cultivate a friendship with her boy. Not that she was ungentle; she craved his affection, but she made the mistake of demanding it as her right — all of which is the same as saying that she was mentally insensitive, and was unaware that with thoughtful people the road to the heart must first lead through the mind; of people's minds she was incurious. She gave her son the kind of education which befits men to inherit rather than to earn. His wishes were never consulted; nor even when he went to university was he given any choice. Like a dumb brute beast he was

goaded forward without knowledge of his destination, and was expected to be grateful to the hand which kept him moving, and prevented him from turning aside.

He permitted this well-intentioned despotism not through any lack of spirit, but partly because it was well-intentioned, and mostly because his immediate present seemed of little consequence to him. He felt himself to be an embryo prophet who awaited his hour; when that should strike, he would concentrate. Not until he was twenty-two years of age did he expostulate, and by that time it was too late; his training had made him dependent upon money for success. His mother had the money, and she selected the Bar as a suitable profession for him; then it was that he broke his twelve years' silence, and scandalised her with the information that his great ambition was to follow in his father's footsteps, and to find both him and El Dorado, fulfilling the promise which he had given as a child. Startled by this unexpected confession, she had charged him with disloyalty and ingratitude to herself; to avoid complications and a breach which he foresaw would become irreparable, he had accepted her choice and studied for a barrister. This utterance of his secret, however, had only served to make him aware of the intensity of his own desire. He could not work, he could not rest, he could not apply his mind; always he saw before him the tropic river with its multitude of carnation, crimson, and orange-tawny birds, its low green banks where the deer come down to graze, and far ahead and visionary the swampy lake, built on whose shore the golden city raises up its head. So books, and law, and London became for him the custodians of his captivity — things to be hated and despised.

In the three years which followed he had made one friend, a mining engineer, by name Druce Spurling. In him he had confided, and Spurling had responded with a sympathy which did him credit, kindling to the romance of the story. He had tested with his expert knowledge the evidence which Granger had laid before him for the belief that such a city as El Dorado had existed, and he had been satisfied — or, at any rate, had been made certain that in the watershed of the Orinoco gold was yet to be found in great quantities, as in the Spaniard's time. He had promised that, so soon as he had the capital, he would help him in his quest. Granger coveted the journey for its adventure, and the opportunity of fulfilling his promise to his father; Spurling only for its possibilities of attaining wealth. In their community of ambition this difference of purpose was lost to sight. Then, when Granger was twenty-five and had just completed his course of reading for the Bar, his great chance came. It was the year of the Klondike gold-rush and Spurling was going out; he wanted a partner, and offered to take Granger with him if he, in return, would promise to give him one third of all the gold he mined. Their idea was that, with the money thus earned, they would be able to provide funds for the following up of their dream of El Dorado. Granger accepted the offer at once, partly influenced by his desire to prove to his mother that he *could* do something by himself. After a painful farewell, he had departed to seek his fortune in the North World.

Ah, how his mother had cried when he went away! He recalled all that to-day, now that he was in Keewatin, and gazed back incredulously upon that mistaken former self, wondering whether he could have been really like

that. London, indeed! What would he not give to be in London to-day; to stand in Fleet Street, listening to the roar of the passing traffic and brushing shoulders with living, companionable men? Ah well, what good purpose would it serve to think about it! He had chosen his own fate. Here he was at Murder Point, and he would soon be married to Peggy, after which, no matter what avalanche of good luck befell him, there would be no return. What would his proud old mother say to a little half-breed grandchild? The mere thought made him smile. In cynical self-derision, he pictured himself accompanied by his Indian tribe, knocking at the door of the old red house on Clapton Common — and his reception there. He gave a name to his picture, and it was "*The Return of the Ne'er-do-well.*"

* * * * *

His brain was getting cloudy; he could not tell whether he was asleep or awake. He felt as if he had been bound hand and foot so that he could not stir, and had been raised aloft to a dizzy height. He knew that he was far above the earth, for he was very cold and was conscious of mists which drifted across his face and left it damp. Suddenly he discovered that he could open his eyes. Looking down, he saw with supernatural distinctness the entire course of the frozen river-bed. Far to the north he could descry Spurling, plodding desperately on across the thawing ice. A few miles to the west, perhaps an hour's journey from Murder Point, he could see a second figure, tall, soldierly, erect, which approached with swift clean strides, through the solitude, inevitably as Fate— the symbol of Justice in pursuit of Crime. He watched with fascination how the distance between the hunter and the hunted narrowed; only one thing could

save the criminal from capture — the intervention of Murder Point.

And then the cloud rolled back again; he closed his eyes, and lost consciousness in untroubled forgetfulness.

CHAPTER VI

THE PURSUER ARRIVES

He was awakened by a man bending over him and holding a lighted match to his face. Careless as usual of preserving his life, he did not attempt to rise or defend himself, but simply gazed back indifferent and a little bewildered. He did not recognise the man; he was an utter stranger. As if wearied with an inspection which did not interest him, he turned his eyes away, and found that the room had become dark. How many hours he had slept, he could not calculate; perhaps nine or ten. He wondered what had made the night return so quickly. He looked toward the window, and saw that it was blinded with snow; and, as he listened, could hear the roaring of the wind, and, in the lull which followed, the rustling and settling down of the flakes. Then the match went out, and neither of them could perceive the other's face. Granger arose and pushed back the shutter of the stove, that so they might get a little light. "I needn't ask you to make yourself at home," he said; "you've done that already."

The stranger did not reply, but surveyed him closely all the while.

"You must have had good company out there to be so silent now that you have arrived."

Then the man spoke. "What's your name?" he asked abruptly. "Is it Granger?"

"I was always told so, and have as yet found no good reason for believing otherwise."

"Then this is the store of Garnier, Parwin, and Wrath, to which I was directed by Robert Pilgrim of God's Voice?"

"That is right, but I don't often have the pleasure of entertaining guests from God's Voice."

The stranger paused in doubt, as though choosing the best words to say; then he blurted out, "But you're a gentleman?"

"I hope so."

"An Oxford man?"

"Yes."

"What college?"

"Corpus."

"Did you row in the Eight?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. At what time?"

"When Corpus went up five places and bumped the House on the last night."

"I was stroke in the 'Varsity boat that year, and rowed at six in the Christ Church Eight that night."

"Then you must be Strangeways?"

"Yes, Corporal Strangeways of the Northwest Mounted Police, but Strangeways of the Oxford boat at one time. I fancied I knew you; you rowed at seven for Corpus, and it was you who won that race."

"I and seven others," laughed Granger; "but what brings you up here at this time?"

"We'll talk about that later. At present I'm hungry; I've hardly had a meal since I left God's Voice."

"Then you're travelling in haste?"

"Yes, in haste."

Granger set to work to prepare a meal, while Strangeways talked to him of the Cornmarket, the Turl, and the Hinkseys, running over the familiar geography for the sheer pleasure of recalling kindly Oxford names. Presently he asked him if he remembered the little maid who had served in the river-inn of the King's Arms at Sanford. Granger had had a summer love-affair with that same maid, as had many a young waterman before and after him. One quiet Sunday evening, when her fickle passion had reached its short-lived height, he had even been allowed the felicity of accompanying her to vespers at the quaint old Norman Church, which lay snuggled away in woods behind the Thames. They had returned to the inn by a roundabout way, through the meadows beneath the twilight, speaking all manner of intense things, and, very wonderfully, believing both themselves and their sayings to be sincere. When he had entered his skiff and pushed out from the bank, she had called him back and royally permitted him to give her his first and, as it proved, only kiss. But he had not known that, and had rowed elated Oxfordwards between the hayfields, dreaming his ecstasy on into the future — when it had already achieved its climax, and slipped out of his life. Since then it had come to seem very simple and absurd, as do all love affairs, however august, which are lived down — for no love affair was ever outlived. So, because he had been fond of her, he was glad to listen to Strangeways, even when he related her newer conquests over more recent undergrads, and her later romantic history. By all accounts she was a modern Helen of Troy, uncontaminate, forever fair and forever juvenile.

And all the while he was listening, Granger was plan-

ning by what means he might detain Strangeways, and hazarding what progress Spurling had made by this time in his escape. "A life for a life," he thought; "and Spurling once saved my life. Until I have cancelled that debt, even though Mordaunt has been slain, I will stand by him."

Throughout the winter months all meals were the same at Murder Point, consisting of black tea, salt bacon, and bannocks, which are a kind of hard biscuit, made of flour and water mixed to a thick paste and then baked. This diet becomes pretty monotonous, but is the traveller's universal fare in Keewatin. In those far regions men are not particular how or what they eat; of necessity they abandon the refinements of civilisation as needless and cumbrous. To-day, however, partly to protract his stay and so give Spurling time, partly to assert his waning gentility, the memory of which in its heyday Strangeways shared, he attempted to be lavish, to set a table, and to entertain. For cloth he spread a dress-length of gaudy muslin, such as Indians purchase for their squaws. He opened some tins of canned goods that he might provide his guest with more than one course. He built up his fire, and commenced to cook. All this used up time; and the expending of time was what he most desired.

When the meal was finished Strangeways rose up restlessly, as though he had just remembered his errand, and went to the door to see what progress the storm had made. The moment the door was opened the wind swept in, driving a fall of snow before it.

"It seems to me," said Granger, "that you're going to be snow-bound for a time. This'll make travelling dangerous, for the thaw has already weakened the ice

in places and now the snow'll cover them over, making them appear safe. It's strange, for blizzards don't often happen so late as this."

"Well, there's one comfort," said Strangeways, "it's the same for all alike; if I'm delayed, so is someone else."

Granger turned his back on him, and walked over to the window where he stood tapping on the glass, attempting to dislodge the snow which had spread itself out like a blanket across the panes. "Poor devil," he said, "I pity him, whoever he is. He can find no place of shelter in all the three hundred and twenty miles which stretch between God's Voice and Crooked Creek, unless he comes here or falls in with some trapper's camp."

"Then you have had no one here lately?"

"No, I haven't seen an Indian for over a month. They don't visit me so late in the winter as this; they wait for the open season, when they can bring in their furs by water."

"But the man I'm speaking of is white. He drives a team of five grey huskies, the leader of which has a yellow face and a patch of brindled-brown upon its right hindquarters. Haven't you seen such an one go by within the last twenty-four hours?"

Granger shook his head; "Perhaps you've passed him on the way," he suggested; "if he knew that you were following him, he may have dodged you purposely and doubled back."

"He knew all right; it was because he knew that I was following that he fled. I can hardly have passed him, for he was seen by a half-breed ten miles from God's Voice, and I've travelled slowly and kept a care-

ful watch between there and here. Besides I tracked his trail to within an hour's journey of the Point, until the snow came down and obliterated it. He was going weakly at the last; both man and dogs must have been spent."

"Then he must be somewhere to the westward, between the spot where you lost his trail and here."

"Perhaps, but the argument against that is that his trail was at least twelve hours old. Anyhow, I shall have to wait until this blizzard is over. During that time he may struggle in from the west, or, if he has gone by, may be driven back here for shelter by the gale."

Granger had not thought of that contingency, that Spurling might be driven back by the weather, might push open the door at any moment and give him the lie before Strangeways. Perhaps a look of fear passed across his face, which betrayed him. At any rate, the next thing he heard was Strangeways, saying to him in a careless voice, "Of course, between gentlemen it is scarcely necessary to ask you whether you are telling the truth!"

"It is scarcely necessary."

"Then I beg your pardon for asking."

"You needn't. You've got to do your duty irrespective of caste; whatever I once was, you can see for yourself what I am."

"Yes, a gentleman down on his luck; but still a gentleman. Strange how one gets knocked about by life, isn't it? I little thought when I caught a glimpse of you, leaning on your oar exhausted at the end of that race, that the next time we should meet would be up here. It's curious the things a fellow remembers. Our boats were alongside, just off the Merton barge;

the first thing I saw when I recovered and sat up on my slide was your face, deadly pale, almost within hand-stretch. I don't recall ever to have seen you again until I struck that match an hour ago and held it to you, and you opened your eyes; then it all came back. When you were sleeping you looked haggard, just about the same as you did then. If I'd seen you awake, I don't suppose I should have remembered. . . . I didn't even know where Keewatin was in those days. If anyone had told me that it was a village near Jericho I should have believed him. I daresay you were nearly as ignorant; and now we're here in your shack."

Granger, anxious to keep Strangeway's attention from his pursuit, and his own thoughts occupied, inquired, "And what brought you into the Northwest Territories?"

"Oh, the usual thing — a girl. She was ward to my father, and was to inherit a considerable property when she came of age. I was in love with her, and my father was keen that I should marry her; there was only one hindrance, that her opinion didn't coincide with ours. I found out that my father was trying to break her spirit, and force her to his will. I couldn't allow that; so, having nothing better to do, I left home and came to Canada for a while. Mind you, I'm not condemning my father; he thought that he was doing the best for both our sakes. But I wish he'd left us alone; if he had, I daresay it would have come out all right. She was one of those girls of whom the physiognomists say, "Can be led by kindness, but cannot be driven." The moment she was ordered to do a thing, which in the ordinary course of events she might have chosen to do of her own free will, she refused and hated it.

"When I got to Montreal I was confronted by that stupid superstition of the Canadians, that every young Englishman who has had a better education than themselves, and is possessed of a private income from the old country, must be a remittance-man and a ne'er-do-well -- that he's been sent out because he wasn't wanted by his family. I tried to get employment; not that I needed it, but because I wanted to work. The moment I opened my lips and didn't speak dialect or slang, and displayed hands which were not workman's hands, I was shown out. So I drifted west to Calgary and, after doing a little ranching there, enlisted in the Mounted Police."

"Do you like it?"

"Oh, yes, it's rather a lark, arresting the people who at first affected to despise you. I can always keep myself cheerful by the humour of that. If you've lost your sense of the ridiculous, you'd better join the North-west Mounted Police — for an Englishman the cure's certain."

"And how about the girl?"

"She did a Gilbert and Sullivan trick. After I'd left home my father guessed the reason of my departure, and instead of giving her a rest, redoubled his efforts to make her marry me, that so he might bring me back. He was fond of both of us; we'd been brought up together, and he couldn't bear the idea of either of us being separated from himself. He made an awful mess of things, poor old gentleman; he persecuted her with his arguments to such an extent that one morning he woke up and found that she had vanished. He made all sorts of inquiries, but to the day of his death could never get any news of her whereabouts.

Strangeways paused and commenced to light his

pipe. Granger, who had become interested in the story, waited a minute for him to proceed, but when he had kindled his tobacco and still sat smoking in silence, "Well, and what next?" he asked.

"That is all," said Strangeways; "now tell me about yourself."

"I went into the Klondike with the gold-rush of nearly five years ago. I travelled with a man named Spurling, and a young chap named Jervis Mordaunt, whom we chummed up with in our passage over the Skaguay." He was conscious that Strangeways had jerked out his foot and was looking hard at him. He paid no attention to that, but proceeded leisurely with his tale. He conceived that it would answer his purpose better, in order that he might make the corporal unsuspicious of his share in Spurling's escape, to speak of him in a hostile manner, and to mention all the small and private faults which he could place to his discredit. He told a story of personal disputes between himself and his partners over the working of claims, which left the impression that Spurling and Mordaunt had always sided together against himself, and that finally he, getting sick of the climate, and quarrellings, and his continuous bad luck, had come outside, travelled to Winnipeg, and taken service with Garnier, Parwin, and Wrath, because he was in danger of starving. Of El Dorado, or his real reason for leaving the Yukon, he said nothing.

When he had ended, Strangeways, who had never for a second removed his gaze, inquired in a hoarse, strained voice, "And this man Mordaunt, what was he like?"

"Oh, he was a slim little fellow; we nicknamed him 'The Girl' because of his ways, and because he was so slight."

"How old was he?"

"He couldn't have been more than eighteen when we first met him, for he never had to shave."

"Did he ever tell you anything about himself, where he came from, who were his family, or anything like that?"

"Not that I remember; he was always very close about himself. But what makes you ask these questoins? Do you think that you recognise him?"

Strangeways rose up and paced the room, betraying his agitation, but when he spoke his voice was level and restrained. "By God, I hope not," he said.

Every moment Granger dreaded that he would hear him say that Mordaunt was dead, and yet he wanted certainty. He watched Strangeways pacing up and down, and longed to question him, yet was fearful that in so doing he would betray his own secret. At last he could bear the suspense no longer; that regular walking to and fro tortured him, it was like the constant swinging of a pendulum and made him giddy to look at. When he spoke, it was in a voice so shrill that it surprised himself.

"Tell me once and for all," he cried, "has anything happened to him? Is he dead?"

Strangeways halted, and regarded him with a look half-stern, half-compassionate.

"As for Spurling, you hated him, did you not?" he inquired.

Granger clenched his hands and his voice trembled. "I hated him so much," he said, "that there were times when I would gladly have struck him dead."

"Then, why didn't you?"

Granger started; the question was spoken so fiercely,

and was so searching and direct. It aroused him to a sense of his danger, and helped him to recover himself.

"In the first place you would have hanged me, and in the second there was Mordaunt." As soon as he had said it, he knew that he had made a slip.

"And why Mordaunt?"

He hesitated a minute, gathering himself together. He could feel the scrutiny of Strangeways' eyes and was conscious that he was breathing hard.

The question was repeated, "And why Mordaunt?"

"Because Mordaunt was such a clean fellow that I couldn't do anything shabby in his presence," he said.

"How clean?" Strangeways persisted.

"Why, in every way; he was so honourable."

"But I thought you said just now that he always sided with Spurling when it came to a dispute?"

"So he did in a sense. He never seemed to think that the thing we quarrelled about was worth while, and treated it all with a well-bred contempt. Spurling was usually the one who was unjust, and I the one who complained; so I was usually the one to start the wrangle. Therefore, though he despised Spurling, he always seemed to blame me for my pettiness."

Strangeways turned on him his honest, manly gaze, as if he were about to ask again, "Is that the truth?" But he did not say it. Granger felt a cur for lying, but he was determined to fight for Spurling's life, and, if that were necessary, for his own revenge.

"And you have not seen Spurling go by the Point?" asked Strangeways.

"No." He said it quite ordinarily, as if he were answering a commonplace. Then he realised that he had been caught in a trap and had not manifested enough

surprise. He slowly raised up his eyes, shame-facedly, like a schoolboy detected cribbing, when the master steals up behind.

"I'm afraid, after all, that you are not a gentleman," was all that Strangeways said.

Granger shrank back and flushed as if he had been struck across the face; he did not attempt to defend himself or expostulate. The wind had died down outside; it was evident that the storm had spent itself. In the silence which followed he could hear the padding steps of the huskies going round the house, and the sound of them sniffing about the door. Strangeways, who had been fastening on his snowshoes preparatory to departure, walked across the room and raised the latch. He stepped out, leaving the door open behind him. A bar of moonlight leapt instantly inside, as it had been a fugitive who had been kept long waiting. Then he heard the voice of Strangeways calling, "Granger, Granger."

He rose up hurriedly, thinking that perhaps Spurling had been driven back by the blizzard and was returning to his danger. When he reached the threshold he saw only this — the moon tossing restlessly in a cloudy sky, shining above a shadowy land of white; Strangeways standing twenty paces distant with his back towards him; and, seated on their haunches between Strangeways and the threshold, five lank grey huskies, one of which had a patch of brindled-brown upon its right hindquarters and a yellow face.

CHAPTER VII

THE CORPORAL SETS OUT

It would have been easy to shoot Strangeways at that time, and he must have known it; yet, he was so much a gentleman that he accepted the risk, and had the decency to turn his back when circumstances compelled him to give a man the lie. Granger wondered whether courtesy was the motive; or whether he was only testing him out of curiosity, to see of what fresh vulgarity of deceit he was capable.

As he stood in the doorway, his gaze wandered from the broad shoulders of Corporal Strangeways, late stroke of the 'Varsity Eight, to the treacherous eyes of the gaunt grey beast before him which, by reason of its unusual markings and untimely appearance, had once and forever thrown Spurling's game away. There was something Satanic and suggestive of evil about those green and jasper eyes, and the manner in which they blinked out upon him from the furious yellow head. Were they prompting him to crime, saying, "Why don't you fire? He can't defend himself; see, his back is turned?" No, not that. He half-believed that the brute was endowed with human intelligence, and had betrayed his late master of set purpose — perhaps, in revenge for the many beatings he had received on the trail from Selkirk to Murder Point. There was a vileness in the creature's look that was degrading and stirred

up hatred — and surely, the lowest kind of enmity which can be entertained by man is toward a unit of the dumb creation. That he should feel so, humiliated and angered Granger. Was there not enough of ignominy for him to endure without that? He drew his revolver, took aim at this yellow devil — but could not fire. The beast did not cringe and run away, zigzagging to avoid the bullets, stooping low on its legs, as is the habit of huskies when firearms are pointed at them; it sat there patiently blinking, a little in advance of its four grey comrades, with a mingled expression of amusement and boredom in its attitude, like a sleepy old bachelor uncle at a Christmas entertainment when Clown and Harlequin commence their threadbare jests and fooleries. He might have been yawning and saying to himself, "Hang it all! Why do I stay? I know the confounded rubbish by heart—all that these fellows will do and say."

Granger's hand dropped to his side; this wolf-dog looked so far from ignorant — so much wiser than himself. Could it be that he also was playing in the game? Was it possible that he also was intent on helping Spurling? Well, then, he should have his chance.

For himself the season for deception was at an end; he had lied to gain time for the fugitive, now let him see what truth could effect. He waded through the snow to Strangeways, tapped him on the shoulder, and was made painfully aware of the opinion held of him by the way in which the corporal screwed his shoulder aside.

"I suppose I seem to you a pretty mean kind of a beast?"

"I suppose you do."

"I seem so to myself; but I have an excuse to make — that this man once saved my life."

"So you're a hero in disguise?"

"No, but I couldn't go back on a man who had done that."

"I fail to see that that is a reason why you should have lied."

"I called it an excuse."

"In this case the words mean the same."

"Well, then, I had a reason: if the person whom Spurling murdered is the person whom I . . ."

"Indeed! So you knew that much, did you?" At mention of the word "murdered," Strangeways had swung fiercely round and confronted Granger.

"Yes, I know that much. And if the man whom Spurling murdered is the man whom I suspect him to be, I had intended to dispense with law and to exact the penalty slowly, up here whence there is no escape, myself."

"Then you'll be sorry to hear that you've lied to no purpose. The person whom Spurling murdered was not a man, you damned scoundrel."

Strangeways turned sharply away from him, and, moving as briskly on his snowshoes as the unpacked state of the snow would allow, commenced methodically to go about the store in ever widening circles. He evidently suspected that the fugitive was still in hiding there, or had been at the time of his arrival, and had since escaped, in which case the snow would bear traces of his flight. When he had searched the mound in vain, he turned his attention to the river-bed where his team of dogs was stationed. Granger, watching him from above, saw that he had halted suddenly and was bending down. Then he heard him

calling his dogs together and saw him harnessing them quickly into his sledge. Panic seized him lest Strangeways should drive away without telling him the name of *this thing, which was not a man*, which Spurling had murdered, and *whether the deed had been done in the Klondike*. Also he was curious to see for himself what it was that he had found in the snow down there, which made him so eager to set out. He ploughed his way down the hillside, breaking through the surface and slipping as he ran, till he arrived out of breath at the river-bank. Then he saw the meaning of this haste; approaching the Point from the northward was a muffled track, partially obliterated by the snow which had since fallen, which, on reaching Murder Point, doubled back, returning northward whence the traveller had come. It meant to Granger that, while he and Strangeways had been seated together recalling old times in the store, Spurling had come back. For what reason? No man would fight his way through a blizzard without good purpose; he would lie down where he was till the storm had spent itself, lest he should wander from his trail. This man had everything to lose by turning back. Then he discovered that the snow was speckled with dots of black, and, stooping down, discerned that they were drops of blood. Some of the blood-marks were fresh; the tracks themselves had been made, perhaps, within the last three hours. Spurling must have met with an accident, and, returning to the Point for help, had seen the stranger's dogs and sledge, and turning northwards again had fled. So thought Granger.

Strangeways, in the meanwhile, was examining the feet of his leader. Presently he stood erect, and asked in a low voice, "Did you do that?"

"What?"

"Look for yourself."

Granger looked, and saw that the balls of the leader's forefeet had been gashed several times with a knife.

"How should I have done it?" he replied. "I've been in your company every minute since you arrived."

"Who did it, then?"

"You know as well as I."

"And what do you think of a man who could do that?"

"That he was very desperate."

"I should call him a Gadarene swine."

Strangeways stood in angry thought for a few seconds; then he jerked up his head, and asked, "Can you lend me another team of huskies? Be careful when you answer that you tell me the truth this time."

Granger smiled at the childishness of such threatening.

"You will gain nothing by speaking like that," he said. "Unfortunately for you, unlike Spurling, I am not afraid of death — I should welcome it. Yet, while I live, I am curious; therefore I will promise you help on one condition, that you tell me who has been murdered, and where."

Strangeways lifted his eyes and surveyed Granger, asking himself, "And is this statement also a lie?" But, when he spoke there were the beginnings of a new respect in his voice. "So you are not afraid of death?" he said. "Well, then, I owe you an apology for what I have called you, for I am; I am horribly afraid. I am afraid that I shall die before I have avenged this death."

"Tell me, who was it that was killed?" cried Granger, impatiently. "Was it a girl? There was a girl whom I loved in the Klondike; you don't know how you make me suffer."

"Don't I?" replied Strangeways, grimly; and then with affected indifference, "There are a good many girls in the Klondike; the body of this one was found washed ashore near Forty-Mile."

"What's her name?"

"That's what I'm here to find out."

"Did Spurling know that she was a woman when he shot her?"

"So you know that also — that he shot her? Whether he knew, I don't care; the fact remains that she is dead and that he is suspected."

"Only suspected?"

"Well, . . ."

"By God!" cried Granger, bringing down his fist in Strangeways' face, "but you shall tell me! Was her name Mordaunt, and was she his partner, and did she wear a man's disguise?"

Strangeways turned his head and dodged aside so that the blow fell lightly; drawing his revolver, he covered his opponent. Granger advanced close up, until the barrel of the revolver touched his face; then he halted and waited.

Strangeways watched him; looked into his eyes amazed; then lowered his weapon and laughed nervously. "Oh," he said, "I remember, you are not afraid of death."

"But I am of madness and suspense."

Strangeways did not reply at once. Perhaps a sudden understanding had dawned on him, pity and a vision of what it meant to live through the eternal Now at Murder Point. He may have been asking himself, "For the lack of one small untruth, shall I thrust this man into Hell?" At any rate, when he answered he spoke

gently. "No," he said, "she wore a woman's dress; be sure of it, your girl-friend is safe up there."

Granger looked at him steadily, wondering why he should have lied; than he took his hand and pressed it in the English manner, "I believe you," he said. Yet, at the back of his mind a voice was persistently questioning, "Do I believe him? But can I believe that?"

He was interrupted in his thoughts by Strangeways saying, "It's a pity that that poor brute should suffer; he's certain to die."

The corporal went near, levelled his revolver and shot the leader between the eyes. The bullet did its work; the dog shivered, and tottered, rolled over on its side, tried to rise again, then stretched itself out wearily as if for sleep at the end of a hard day's travel.

"You can do that for a mere husky," said Granger bitterly; "but you refuse to do it for a man."

"The husky had a harsh time of it in this world and has no other life."

"If that's so, he's to be congratulated; but there was the more reason why he should have been allowed to live his one life out. We wretched men are never done with life; if I were sure that there was only one existence and no reproaches in a future world, I could be brave to the end. It's this repetition of mortality, which men call immortality, that staggers my intellect, making me afraid — afraid lest there is no death."

Strangeways shrugged his shoulders and scowled. He did not like the subject — it caused him discomfort; there was so much left for him in life. He planned, when he had captured Spurling and seen him safely hanged, to buy himself out of the Mounted Police, return to England, and there live pleasantly at his club

in London and as squire on his estate. He would marry, he told himself; and though not the girl whom he had most desired, for he believed her to be dead, yet, like a sensible man, some other girl, who would be his friend, and bear his children, and make him happy. If once he could get out of Keewatin, having performed his duty honourably, he would do all that — when Spurling had been captured alive or dead.

Therefore he broke in on Granger roughly, inquiring, "Where are those huskies which you are going to lend me?"

"They are Spurling's huskies which he left behind when I lent him mine."

"How long ago was that? — If they're Spurling's, they must be pretty well played out."

"They are. They've rested for thirty hours more or less; but I don't think you'll manage to catch him up with them."

"Perhaps not, but I'll try; he can't be more than three hours ahead."

"Three hours with a fresh team is as good as three days."

"You forget the difference between the two men."

"No, I don't, for the one has the memory of his crime."

"It's the memory of his crime that'll wear him out, and that same memory that'll give me strength."

"Why? What makes you hate him so? Supposing he did kill a woman, it may have been an accident. She may even have felt grateful for the bullet, as I should have done just now had you shot me dead. It's horrible to kill anyone, but then the poor devil's fleeing for his life and he's suffering a thousand times more pain than he inflicted."

"Is he? Does he suffer the pain of the man who follows behind? Supposing a certain man had loved that woman and had lost her, and had planned all his life on the off-chance of meeting her again, dreaming of her day and night, and then had suddenly learnt that she was brutally dead by Spurling's hand on some God-forsaken Yukon River, where the ground was hard like iron so that no grave could be dug by the murderer, and her body froze to marble and lay exposed all winter through the long dark days, with the bullet wound red in her forehead, and her grey face looking up toward the frosty sky, till the spring came and the water washed her body under and threw it up in a creek near Forty-Mile, where a year later it was discovered mutilated and defiled, do you think that her lover would be glad of that? Do you think that he would pity the blackguard who could do such a scoundrelly deed as that?"

Strangeways was speaking wildly, his voice was trembling and his face was haggard and lined; he was crying like a child. "The man who could do a deed like that," he shouted, menacing the stars with his clenched hand, "the man who could do a deed like that is so corrupt that even God would search for good in him in vain. It's the duty of every clean man to hound him off the earth. While we allow him to live, we each one share his taint. I'll pray God every day of my life that Spurling may be damned throughout the ages — eternally and pitilessly damned."

When Granger could make his voice heard, "You don't mean that she was Mordaunt?" he cried. All this talk about a woman who had been lost and loved paralleled his own case — he took it as applied to himself.

Strangeways recovered himself with an effort, "No, no," he said huskily. "Mordaunt, you have told me, was a man. I was only supposing all that."

"But Mordaunt was not a man, but a woman in man's clothing."

Strangeways closed his lips tightly together, refusing to take notice, pretending that he had not heard. Granger spoke again. "Mordaunt was not a man," he said.

"In that case," answered Strangeways, "you know what the man suffers who is following behind. I will tell you no more than that."

"You've told me enough and I will help you; only pledge me once more on your sacred word that this body was found in a woman's dress."

Strangeways hesitated; then his eyes caught again the bleakness of the land and his imagination pictured the awful loneliness of life up there. Looking full on Granger he said, "On my most sacred word as a brother-gentleman, the body that was found was clothed in a woman's dress."

"Then, thank God, she was not Mordaunt!" said Granger; "but because he knew her to be a woman at the time when he killed her, I will help you none the less."

Having called together Spurling's huskies, they found them to be too weak for travel, with the exception of the leader, therefore they harnessed in the corporal's remaining four dogs, putting the yellow-faced stranger at their head. No sooner had they turned their backs and gone inside the store to bring out the necessary provisions, than the four old dogs, jealous of their new leader, hurled themselves upon him, burying their fangs

in his shaggy hair, intent on tearing him to death — an old-timer husky can stand a good deal of that. He strained on the traces, exposing to them only his hindquarters, running well ahead, and keeping his throat safe. Not until the two men had clubbed them nearly senseless did they subside into sullen quietness; and then only so long as they were watched. Once a back was turned, the four hind dogs piled on to their leader and the fight recommenced.

"You won't go far with them," said Granger. He did not notice the look of reawakened suspicion which flickered in Strangeways' eyes. "You won't go far with them; the moment you camp and that yellow-faced beast gets his chance, he'll chew your four dogs to pieces. That's what he's there for, it's my belief — he's playing Spurling's game. He'll take you fifty or a hundred miles from Murder Point, and there leave you stranded."

"What would you advise?" This was spoken in a quiet voice.

"I would advise you to wait here till the summer has come, and then to proceed by water."

"But on snow I can follow his trail, whereas travel by water leaves no traces."

"What does that matter? Instead of following him, let him return to you, as he did to-night. You've driven him up a blind alley on this Last Chance River; he can only go to the blank wall of the Bay, and then come back."

"He can reach the House of the Crooked Creek."

"And if he does, what of that? He'll be touching the blank wall then. They won't want him. The first question that they'll ask him will be, "And what have

you come here for? If he can't give a satisfactory account of himself, they'll place him under arrest. When you get news of that, you can go up there and fetch him."

"And if he doesn't get so far as that?"

"You can set out by canoe and drive him back, and back, till you come to the Bay, and he can go no further."

"He might hide, and I might pass him on the way — what then?"

"In that case he'd double back and come past Murder Point, trying to get out."

"In the meanwhile I should be a hundred, two hundred miles to the northwards, travelling towards the Bay on my fool's errand, and who would be here to capture him?"

"Why, I should."

"Precisely."

Granger started; the way in which that last word had been spoken had made Strangeways' meaning manifest. He blushed like a girl at the shame of it. "Surely you don't still distrust me? You don't think me such a sneak that, having got you out of the way, I'd let him slip by and out?"

"It looks like it."

"But, man, don't you realise that our interests are the same?"

"Since when?"

"Since you told me of a woman who was done to death on a Yukon river, and lay unburied all winter till the thaw came, and her body was washed down to a creek near Forty-Mile, where it lay through the summer naked, gazed upon, uncovered, and defiled."

"I fancy you knew all that when you helped Spurling to escape."

"Yes, but I didn't know that it was a woman, and I didn't know her name."

"And you don't know her name now."

"I do; it was Jervis Mordaunt who wore a man's disguise."

"I told you that she wore a woman's dress."

"I know. I know."

"Then do you mean to tell me that I lied?"

"Perhaps, but not to accuse you. You said it out of kindness, and that was partly true which you said. You meant that the body was naked when it was found."

"If you dare to speak of her like that again, I'll choke you, and run the risk of getting hanged myself. The land has debased you, as the Yukon debased your friend. I can read you; you're still half-minded to play his game, and that's why you want to turn me back."

"Yes, I want to turn you back. Spurling's a hard-pressed man and he's dangerous. You can judge of what he is capable by what has just happened. He's cunning and, in his way, he's brave; he wouldn't scruple to take your life. Your best policy is to wait — either here or at God's Voice, as you think best. The ice will soon be unsafe to travel; already a mile from here, where the river flows rapidly round from the south-west, the part on the inside bend is rotten. I had to guide Spurling round that. At first, before I saw you and knew who you were, I was tempted not to warn you, to let you take your own chance and go on by yourself, and, perhaps, get drowned; but now, after I have seen you and after what you have told me, I can't do that."

"So you were tempted to let me drown myself, and now you are repentant?"

Granger bowed his head.

"Then I tell you that if the ice were as rotten as your soul or Spurling's, I would still follow him, though I had to follow him to Hell. If I've got to die, I'll die game — and you shan't turn me back."

Granger ran out after him, calling him to stay, offering to guide him round the danger spot in his trail. But suspicion and untruthfulness had done their work. Only once did he turn his head, when at the crack of the whip the yellow-faced leader leapt forward in his traces. Then he answered him and cried, "He killed the woman I loved, and he shall pay the price though I follow him to Hell."

So far as is known, these were the last words which Strangeways ever said.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAST OF STRANGEWAYS

GRANGER returned to his shack and, closing the door, sat down beside the stove in his accustomed place. He commenced to fill his pipe slowly, stretching out his legs as if he were preparing for a long night of late hours and thoughtfulness. But he could not rest, his whole sensitiveness was listening and alert; the muscles of his body twitched, as if rebuking him for the delay which he imposed on them. He was expecting to hear a cry; whose cry, and called forth by what agony, he did not dare to surmise, only he must get there before it was too late. Somewhere between his shack and the Forbidden River he must get before the agony began. He rose up, and putting on his capote and snowshoes hurriedly, went out following Strangeways' trail. He had no time to realise the folly of his action — this leaving of his store unguarded and setting forth without an outfit at a season of the year when, perhaps, within a week the ice would break. He did not consider how far he might have to follow before he could hope to come up with Strangeways; nor what Strangeways would think of and do with him if, turning on a sudden his head, he should see the man who had lied to him coming swiftly up behind. He would probably shoot him; but Granger in his frenzy to save Strangeways' life did not think of that. His brain was throbbing

with this one thought, that if he did not catch him up before he reached the Forbidden River, he would have seen the last of him alive which any man would ever see in this world, unless that man were Spurling.

So now there were three men spread out across the ice, two of whom followed in the other's steps. The first man was racing to preserve his own life, the second was pursuing to take it, and the third was following with all his strength that he might save the pursuer's life from danger. Of these three the last man alone had no fear of death. The other two were so eager to live, and one of them took such delight in life! Yet, Strangeways was rushing to his destruction as fast as that evil yellow-faced beast, tugging at the traces with might and main, could take him — to where beneath the ice, or in some forest ambush, lay crouched the hidden death. And if he should die, whose fault would that be? Granger was man enough to answer, "The fault would be mine. I told him untruth till he could not believe me when I spoke the truth which would save his life."

Now that he was left solitary again, he resumed that old habit of lonely men of arguing with himself. Between each hurrying stride, he panted out within his brain his unspoken words, his thoughts gasping one behind the other as if his very mind was out of breath. Why had Spurling come back? Why hadn't he killed all ten huskies outright, and so prevented Strangeways from pursuing farther until the break-up of the ice? He would have gained a month by that. His deed bore about it signs of the ineffectual cunning of the maniac; it had been only worth the doing if carried out bitterly to the end. Yet Spurling had not gone mad; he was too careful of his life and future happiness to permit

himself to do that. Then he must have done it for a threat, hoping by the daring and grim humour of his brutality to strike terror into Strangeways and warn him back. Perhaps this was only one of many such experiences which had occurred all along the trail from Selkirk, and the pursuer had recognised both the motive and the challenge. Well, if you're compelled to play the game of life-taking, you may as well keep your temper, and set about it sportsmanly with a jest. Even in this horrid revelation of character there was some of the old Spurling left.

Then his thoughts turned to Strangeways. He wondered, had he lied or told the truth when he asserted that the body was not Mordaunt's which was found at Forty-Mile? He hoped for the best, but he doubted. His manner had been against it, and so had Spurling's; they had both been keeping something back. Perhaps he had lied out of jealousy, because he could not endure to think that this girl, for whom he had been searching, who now was dead, had been loved by another man — and not a worthy man either, but one whom he despised.

(Granger knew that he also would have felt like that. The mere denial of such a fact would have seemed somehow to reserve her more entirely for himself.)

He had not been able to bear the thought that, now that she was beyond reach of all men's search, her memory should be shared with him by another man with an equal quality of affection — it had seemed to him like her hand stretched out from the grave to strip him of the few mementoes of her which he had. For these reasons he might even have lied truthfully, being self-persuaded that this Jervis Mordaunt was a different girl.

Granger heartily hoped that his suspicions might be mistaken, but . . . Whatever happened he must come up with him, and ask him that question once again. Maybe last time he had not spoken plainly; Strangeways had not grasped what he meant. He could not remember how his question had been phrased, but this time it should be worded with such brutal frankness that there could be no chance of error. He would lay hold of him strongly, and clasp him about the knees so that he could not escape. He would never release his hold till his doubts had been set at rest. He would say to him quite clearly, "I loved a girl in the Klondike who called herself Jervis Mordaunt; she passed for a man, and was clothed in a Yukon placer-miner's dress. She did not know that I loved her; so you need not grieve if this murdered girl whom you loved, and the one whom I call Mordaunt, were one and the same. I fled from the Shallows where we worked together, partly in order that she might not know that. Now will you tell me, once and for all, was this girl, whom Spurling murdered, called Mordaunt? If you love God, tell me the truth and speak out. I can bear the truth, but I cannot endure this suspense."

With the careful precision of a mind uncertain of its own sanity, he repeated and re-balanced his phrases, distrusting his own exactness, fearful lest he had not chosen such words as would make his meaning plain. Ah, but by his gestures, if language failed him, he would cause him to understand. For such news, even though it should be bad news, he would pledge his honour to help Strangeways in his search for Spurling. He would even volunteer to go single-handed and capture him himself — bring him down to Murder Point by guile,

where Strangeways would be waiting to take him. The best and worst which he himself could derive from such a promise would be only that he should meet with death — but he should have thought of that offer earlier, and made it while Strangeways was with him.

At that word *death* the purpose of his present errand flared vividly in his mind, and he hurried his pace.

Looking back across his shoulder through the darkness, for the moon was under cloud, he could just make out where his store pinnacled the mound at the Point; he had left the door open in the haste of his departure and, over the threshold slantwise across the snow, the fire from the stove threw an angry glare. It was only a mile from the Point to the bend, yet he seemed to have been journeying for hours. The surface of the river was difficult to travel because the snow which had fallen was wet; it shrank away from the feet at every stride. For this season of the year in Keewatin the night was mild; there was a damp rawness, but scarcely any frost in the air. If the ice had been rotten in the morning at the bend, it would be doubly treacherous now. Ah, but he had warned Strangeways! Surely he would be sufficiently cautious to half-believe him at least in that. When he came to where the river turned northwards, he would forsake the short-cut of the old trail and swing out into the middle stream, or work safely round along the bank. If he couldn't scent danger for himself, his huskies would choose their own path and save him, unless — unless, feeling the smoothness of the old trail beneath the snow, they should lazily choose that, or unless that leader of Spurling's should wilfully lead them astray; but surely the four hind-dogs would have sense not to follow him, and would hang back.

He kept his eyes on the darkness before him, but to the northeast all was shadowy; he could discern nothing. Yes, there was something moving over there. He judged that he had already traversed three-quarters of that interminable mile; surely he would be able to catch up with him now. The recent blizzard had wiped out the old trail, but he could still feel it firm beneath the snow; he was following in Strangeways' tracks — Strangeways' which had been Spurling's. Then he came to a point where the staler tracks, which were Spurling's, had branched out into mid-stream to round the bend; but he saw to his horror that Strangeways' had kept on to the left by the winter trail, toward the spot of which he had warned him — he had even suspected that that final warning was a trap.

Ah, there he was straight ahead of him; he could see him distinctly now. The moon, rising clear of cloud, made his figure plain. He called to him, and it seemed that he half-turned his head. He was keeping perilously near in to the bend. He called to him again, and signed to him with his arms to drive out. Then once more a cloud passed before the moon, making the land seem dead.

He advanced cautiously, moving slowly, testing the strength of the ice at each fresh step before trusting it with his weight. Underneath he could hear the lapping of the current as it rushed rapidly round the bend, and could feel the trembling of the crust beneath his feet, as a man does the vibration of an Atlantic liner when the engines are working at full pressure, and every plank and bolt begins to shake and speak. When he had come to where Strangeways had been standing, he stood still and listened. He could hear no sound of travel,

no cursing of a man's voice, urging his dogs forward, or cracking of a whip. Then he felt the ice sagging from under him, and the cold touch of water creeping round his moccasins. From a rift in the cloud, a segment of the moon looked out. Before and behind him lay the frozen expanse of river, with its piled-up banks on either hand, and its heavy blanketing of snow, smooth and level, making its passage seem safe. Far over to the right stretched the trail of Spurling, showing ugly and black against the white, where his steps and the steps of his dogs had punctured the surface. Just before him, three yards distant, the ice had broken open, leaving a gaping hole over whose jagged edges the water climbed, and whimpered, and fell back, like a fretful child in its cot, which has wakened too early and is trying to clamber out.

As Granger watched, heedless of his own safety, a hand pushed out above the current, the hooked fingers of which searched gropingly for something to which they might make fast. Granger, throwing himself flat in the snow, so as to distribute his weight, crawled towards it. The hand rose higher, and then the arm, followed at last by the head and eyes of Strangeways, but not the mouth. He had caught hold of a point of ice and was trying to pull himself up by that; but something (was it the swiftness of the current?) was dragging his body away from under him so that the water was still above his nose and mouth. Granger wormed his way to within arm-stretch and clasped his hand; but the moment he commenced to pull, the weight became terrific — more than the weight of one man — and he himself began to slide slowly forward till his head and shoulders were above the water. Something was tug-

ging at Strangeways from below the river, so that his body jerked and quivered like a fisherman's line when a well-hooked salmon is endeavouring to make a rush at the other end.

Granger was leaning far out now, the surface was curving from under him and his chest had left the ice. Then he realised what had happened: the loaded sledge had sunk to the bottom of the river-bed, and was holding down the four rear-dogs by their traces; but the leader, by struggling, had fought his way to within a few inches of the outer air, and, clinging on to Strangeways' throat and breast, was fiercely striving to climb up him with his teeth to where breathing might be found, in somewhat the same manner as Archbishop Salviati did in Florence to Francesco Pazzi, when the Gonfalonier hurled them both out of the Palazzo window, each with a rope about his neck.

(Strange what men will think of at a crisis! Granger was grimly amused, and half-disgusted with himself. How absurd that of all things at such a time he should have remembered that!)

The weight of the four rear-dogs and the loaded sledge were gradually dragging the leader down, and, with him, Strangeways. He held on desperately; now and then, as he made a fresh effort, his yellow snout would appear above the water or the top of his yellow head — except for that, he might not have been there. But Granger was intent on Strangeways; staring into his eyes, which were distant the length of his arm outstretched, he was appalled at the consternation they reflected, and the evident terror of the end. If he could only get at his knife, he might be able to effect something; but his knife was beneath his capote, in his belt,

and both his hands were occupied, the one with supporting the drowning man, the other with preventing himself from slipping further.

He wanted to speak to Strangeways, but he could not think of any words which were not so trivial as to sound blasphemous on such an occasion. The man was growing weaker and heavier to hold; his eyes were losing their vision, and the water rose in bubbles from his mouth. There was only one last chance, that if he could support him long enough for the husky at his throat to release his grip and die first, he might be able to drag him out.

Though all this had been the work of only a few seconds, his arm was becoming numb and intolerably painful. Whatever it might cost him, he promised himself that he would not let go till hope was at an end. He was slipping forward again; he would soon overbalance. But what did that matter to one who did not fear death? After all, an honourable out-going is the best El Dorado which any man can hope to find as reward for his long life's search. If he were to die for and with Strangeways, he would at least prove to him that he was not entirely worthless.

Then, before it was too late, he found his words. "Be brave," he shouted hoarsely, "be brave! It is only death."

It would have seemed a preposterous supposition yesterday that the private trader at Murder Point should ever be in a position to bid the veriest scum among cowards to be brave. As he spoke, the intelligence came back to Strangeways' eyes, the fear went out from them and the features, losing their agony, straightened into an expression which was almost grave.

His hand became small in Granger's palm, as though it were offering to slip away.

Some deep instinct stirred in Granger; he suddenly loved this man for the self-denial which that act betrayed. If there was to be a denial of self, however, he was emphatic that his should be the sacrifice. Was it this thought of sacrifice which brought religion to his mind — some haunting, quick remembrance of those wise words about "dying for one's friend"?

Quite irrationally and without connection with anything which had previously occurred, leaning yet further out at his own immediate peril, shifting his grip to Strangeways' wrist that he might hold him more firmly, he whispered, "Jesus of Galilee! Jesus Christ!"

The face of the drowning man took on an awful serenity, a look of holiness, as if at sight of something which stood behind Granger, which he had only just discerned. He even smiled. Suddenly, with the determination of one who had concluded and conquered an old temptation, he wrenched away his hand. Granger made one last effort to reach him, but the tugging of the beast below the surface, or its dead weight, had drifted him out of arm-stretch. He sank lower. The water rose, almost leisurely it seemed as if now certain of the one thing it had desired, higher and higher up his face till it had reached his eyes, quenched them, and nothing was left but a few bubbles which floated to the surface and broke, sparkling in the moonlight. Granger did not stir; as he had been paralysed, he lay there rigid with the black waters washing about his face and hands. Then very slowly, as though reluctant not to die, he drew himself back. When he had reached safety, rising up, he gazed around; the land looked more deso-

late than ever. The first words which he said were spoken sacredly, with bated breath. "And that man told me," he muttered, "that he was afraid of death. . . . To prefer to die at such a time, rather than risk my life, was the act of a man who was very brave." And next he said, "I wonder what were his last words when he crashed through the ice? I expect he said, 'Damn.' Well, that was as good as any other word to say; after all, all swearing, taken in a certain sense, is a form of prayer — a bluff assertion of belief in the divine."

Granger turned slowly about, and commenced to make his way back to the Point. At first he spoke aloud to himself as a thought occurred. "I distrusted that yellow beast of Spurling's from the first." "Now at any rate Spurling is safe." "I haven't yet discovered whether Mordaunt is dead," — and so on. Then he ceased to speak with his lips, and his thoughts were uttered in the silence of his brain. They had all to do with Strangeways.

He wondered what vision had been his, causing him to smile as he sank. Did he think of that girl, and that he was going to meet her? Or of the old home in England? Or of his school-days? Or was it the Thames he thought about — of Oxford with its many towers, and the cry of the coach along the tow-path as the eight swings homeward up-stream, in the grey of a winter afternoon, to the regular click of the rowlocks as the men pluck their blades from the water, feather and come forward for the next stroke, making ready to drive back their slides as one man with their legs? He was certain that whatever happened, and however he should go out of life, did God spare him a moment's conscious-

ness, it would be the vision of Oxford with its domes and spires, its austere and romantic quiet, its echoing cloisters and passages, its rivers with their sedges of silver and of grey, which would float before his dying eyes, — or would he think of Christ? Had Christ been the vision which this man had seen?

Strange thoughts for Keewatin! But death is always strange.

CHAPTER IX

THE BREAK-UP OF THE ICE

NEARLY a month had gone by since the night on which Strangeways died. Not that time mattered much to Granger, for, like the immortals, men in Keewatin have dispensed with time: they have accepted as true the lesson which philosophers have been striving to teach the world ever since the human intellect first commenced to philosophise — that there are no such ontological facts as Time and Space. Among the men of this vast northern territory the outward expression of religion is rare; they do not often speak, and then only of such interests as are superficial to their lives. Yet here, in their fine neglect of the two sternest of self-imposed, human limitations, the religious instinct is manifest. As it would be sacrilege to count God's breaths, were that possible, so to them it seems a kind of blasphemy to number the recurrence of their own small perceptions when the Divine Perceived seems so entirely unconscious of their very existence. Hence it happens that one does not often hear a traveller speak of having journeyed so many days or miles; his division is more casual, and embraces only his own immediate actions — he has travelled so many "sleeps," nothing more.

As a rule, Indians are utterly deficient in the time-sense and can give no intelligent account of their age. Their calendar is enshrined, if they have one, in symbols

which they use as decorations, painted on the inside of their finest skins. They make their reckoning of the years from some event which was once important to themselves, or to their tribe. Thus, stars falling from the top to the bottom of a robe represent the year of 1833, and an etching of an Indian with a broken leg and a horn on his head stands for the year in which Hay-waujina, One Horn, had his leg "killed." Back of that which is comparatively immediate to their own experience, they have ceased to count or to be inquisitive.

> "Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass
> Their pleasures in a long immortal dream."

So with both the joys and sorrows of these Northland men; hurry is not necessary where time is unrecognised, and turbulence of emotion, whether of grief or gladness, is felt to be out of place in a *dream-being*, whose sole reality is its unreality. Their personal unimportance to the Universe, and remoteness from the Market-place of Life allow them to dawdle. Their experiences have no sharp edges, no abrupt precipices, no divisive gulfs, no defined beginnings and endings. The book of their sojourn in this world has neither chapters nor headings; the page runs on without hindrance from tragedy to comedy, comedy to farce, farce to melodrama, and thence to tragedy again — always it returns to tragedy. They stride round the Circle of the Emotions without halting, merging from joy into sorrow without preface, till one day the feet grow wearier and lag, the eyes grow clear and, almost without knowing it, as did Strangeways, their dream going from them, they awake — motionlessly pass out of life, and enter into *What?*

If smoothness of passage and apparent endlessness be the two main qualities of the divine existence, then the lives of men in Keewatin are both divine and real; only we, of the outside world, would call this same smoothness dulness, and its endlessness its most torturing agony.

The past month had dragged by with Granger as would a century with normal men, except that in the entire span of those hundred years there had been no summer. In them he had lived through and remembered every emotion which had ever come to him. His brain was confused with remembering, fevered with anguish of regret for things lost, which would never come again. He had nearly succumbed to that most unmanly of all spiritual assailants, the coward of Self-Pity — would have succumbed, had not Self-Scorn rendered him aid.

From sunrise to sunset the winter had slowly thawed: the trees had uncovered their greens and browns, thrusting themselves forth from beneath the rain-washed greyness of the melting snow; the river, reluctantly at first, had cracked and swayed, and become engraved by miniature streams which ate their way, as acid on metal, across its surface. Strange messages those narrow streams of water wrote; strange they seemed at least to Granger as he watched them day by day. Sometimes they seemed to be writing words, and sometimes drawing faces. The words he could not always decipher; when he did they were mostly proper names, STRANGEWAYS, SPURLING, MORDAUNT, EL DORADO. The faces were more easy to recognise, and three of them corresponded to the first three names. There was one morning when he awoke, having dreamed of the horrible revenge which he would take,

and going to the window was appalled to see a new face scrawled upon the ice — his own, yet not his own; the evil likeness to the self which had come to him in the Klondike. He was puzzled, and set to work to discover the reason for these signs. Then a verse which he had once learnt as a child came back to him, "Jesus stooped down and wrote with his finger on the ground, *as though he heard them not.* And *they which heard it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, *and the woman.*"

So he knew that it was God's hand which had etched that warning likeness overnight, which his own conscience had discerned, accusing him. Also, in gazing upon that drawing he heard a voice, which was his own voice, used as a medium for another mind, saying, "Now that thou hast seen what thou art like, go out, that I may be left alone *and Spurling.*" So Granger had agreed with God that day that he would cease from his dreams of human vengeance, and leave Him alone with Spurling. He did not dare to tell God all his thoughts, but he felt certain that, had Spurling's opinions been consulted, he would have preferred to be left alone with John Granger. It was terrible enough to have to dwell between God's footsteps, as all men must who live in Keewatin, when His eyes were averted, and He Himself walked by seemingly unconscious of your presence; but to have to live there when He had noticed your presence, and His face was lifted up, while His gaze was bent upon you, with no hope of escape, a fugitive from human justice, alone in an empty land with your own conscience and Him as your accuser, that was to protract the shamefaced confusion of the Last

Judgment through every day of your life. Granger felt that in making that compact he had done his worst by Druce Spurling.

In the middle hours of the night which followed this agreement, which he chose to think of as his compromise with Deity, he was awakened by a thunderous sound, and jumping from his bunk saw that the river had broken up and the ice was going out, as though God, having finished His argument which He had written there, were rubbing out His words. Flinging wide the door, he ran down the mound to the bank, shouting like a boy. As he went he had a panoramic vision of all the other men, both white and red, along the six hundred miles of river which stretched from the great lake to the Hudson Bay, who had been awakened as he had been, and now, or sometime that night, would be doing what he was doing, rushing half-clad beneath the stars down to the river-bank calling on the loneliness to rejoice — the loneliness, which throughout the frozen months had listened so faithfully to all that they had had to say, blasphemous or otherwise, and had made no reply. But this night both silence and loneliness were violated, and cried aloud with rage protestingly; whereat the river only clapped its hands and squeezed its passage, and huddled between its ruined winter-barriers ever northward to the freedom of the Bay.

This was the one night in all the year when revolt was permitted, and the Bastile of Keewatin fell. Fell! Yes, soon the summer would raise it up again in a newer form, only a little less intolerable; and afterwards the winter, that master-builder, would return as a king from his exile. But no one thought of such catastrophe

to-night. For the moment it seemed that the reign of tyranny was ended and the millennium had begun — chaos, which men mistake for millennium.

Granger stood above the bank repeating to himself over and over, "The ice is going out! The ice is going out!" as if it were a fact incredible. Every moment the air vibrated with a roar, and the earth was shaken as some new horseman of the ice was overthrown and hurried by in flight, only to halt presently, ranged side by side with some of his fellows, to make yet another stand. Certainly it was a battle which was being fought, and one which must be lost.

As far as sound could travel, from the west and from the north, he could hear the cannonade, and what seemed like the clatter of hoofs, and the clash of thrown-away swords. It was possible to imagine anything when Nature was making a change so titanic. Now the water was the black horse of Revelation, with a sable rider on his back who carried "a balance in his hand,"— and he was in pursuit. And the ice was the pale horse, and he that sat upon him, his name was Death, and Hades followed with him,— and he was in flight. And now, when some great floe jammed in its passage round the Point, and the ice piled up, it became for Granger a magician's silver palace in Aragon, which a dark-mailed knight of Christendom had travelled leagues to demolish. Outside it shone resplendent and crystal in the starlight; but within it was full of uncleanness, and by day it would vanish.

He amused himself with these fancies, and followed them to their furthest length. He could see the faces of the beleaguered, now evil with terror, peering out from the casements, and the stern old enchanter in the turret,

over whose ledges flowed down his snow-white beard. He could hear the hoarse-throated clamour of the knight as he led his company about the walls, and rammed in the castle's gateway, shouting, "For Christ! For Christ!" The structure trembled and the turret commenced to wave in the air, as it had been a banner. The sorcerer looked out, his eyes were filled with dismay — he could not withstand that name of 'Christ'; he plunged from the height, spreading abroad his arms, and was lost in the blackness of the underground. The dark host swept over the palace still shouting, "For Christ! For Christ!" In the twinkling of an eye, both the evil one and the avenging host were gone — all was resolved into turbid water and submerged, groaning ice.

So he watched the break-up of the ice, and the travelling of the river which, slipping by at his feet, going forth to wander the world, left him stationary. Perhaps some drops of this Last Chance River would some day be washed up in a wave on the tropic shores of Ceylon, or, having spent a winter in the Arctic, would be carried down in a berg and, having melted, flow on round Cape Horn to the Pacific till they came to Polynesia, where they would be parted by the swimming hands of dusky, slender girls. He grew jealous at the thought, and bending down baled out some of the water in his palms, and threw it on the ground, saying angrily, "You at least shall stay." Then he laughed at his folly and was comforted by thinking, "When my body is dead, it also will journey forth. I must be patient like the river, and wait. In God's good time I also shall wander round the world."

"But shall I know? Shall I be conscious of that?" the spirit of discontent inquired.

Granger shook his head irritably, as if by so doing he could throw off these troublesome imaginations. Since the death of Strangeways, he had not recovered his poise of soul. Ah, and Strangeways! Was Strangeways conscious of his body's release, and the permission which death had given him to wander forth? How odd to think that that body, which had been born of a woman in England and tended by her hands, which had strolled through English lanes and over Oxford meadows, gesticulating and talking, doing good and evil, which even in its life had brought the man who inhabited it so many miles from home, now that the soul had departed from it, should be hurrying away alone to hide itself in Arctic fastnesses! Did Strangeways know that? Was he conscious of this new adventure? Well, if God was so anxious to take care of Spurling, He could be trusted to look after Strangeways — if anything of him survived.

The melting of the ice had chilled the air. The coldness of his yet living body awoke him to a realisation of the petty suffering of that small part of his universe which was explored and known. Taking one last look at the ruin which the one night's thaw had worked, the pinnacles, and beauty, and whiteness which it had destroyed, "Courage!" he said, "for this is life."

CHAPTER X

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD

THE sun was shining down; the spring rains had ceased; within less than a month winter had vanished, and summer had swept through Keewatin with a burst of gladness. The land was riotously green; through the heart of it wandered the river, newly released, a streak of azure, or of gilded splendour where smitten by the sun. Although its waters were running freely, many memories of the frozen quiet still remained in the shape of ice piled up along its banks, sometimes to the height of fifteen feet, and of snow in the more shady hollows of the forest, which glimmered distantly between leaves and branches hinting at secret woodland lakes. Even the most backward among the trees had commenced to unfold their buds. All day long, and through the major portion of the night, the frogs continued to whistle in the marshes and along the river's edges. Flock after flock of duck arrived, flashing their wings against the sky, dropping from under a cloud suddenly, and coming to rest in the water with a shower of spray, where they rode at ease side by side, like painted, anchored merchantmen returned in safety from the earth's end. Now the wild swan, teal, or goose would go by with a whirr of wings, crying hoarsely. To make the world seem yet more wide an occasional gull would heave in sight, drifting without effort in

silent flight majestically. In the forest Granger was conscious of a commotion at the cause of which he could only guess. Love was at work in the shadows, or what among the dumb creation passes for love. There was a continual stirring of leaves, the rustle of branches forced aside, the scattering of birds, those spies and betrayers of the four-footed animal, and the grievous low wail of the wolf. Sometimes a fish would leap in the river, flash silvery and dripping in the sunlight, on its bridal journey from the ocean. Was it an act of gallantry, he wondered, which some deep-sea female witnessed from beneath the ripple of the stream, or was it a terrified effort to escape from love. He knew what that best of all passions could mean to the forest animal, and how cruel it might become. Often in the fall of the year he had watched a doe, seen her dash down the river bank, stand quivering, leap in and swim, made fearless of man because she knew that her lover, the stag, was not far behind.

This frenzy of passion set him thinking, and made him long for the return of Peggy Ericsen. He knew that his love for her was not of the highest, was little more than physical, not much nobler than forest love; but what was a man to do, and how guide his conduct when all the world was a-mating? On occasions he had a clearer vision, and realised with a sense of sudden shame to how low a level he had sunk. Then he would strive to throw off this attraction for a half breed girl by recalling the faces of all the other women whom he had admired and loved. Yet this also was dangerous, for it caused him to remember Mordaunt, thoughts of whom roused up anger within him against Spurling. He had agreed to leave him to God, and could not go back on

his word; therefore he must forget Mordaunt and, if his mind must be haunted by womankind, think only of Peggy. Peggy! Well, she was not a bad little sort. Pretty? Yes. But between her and himself there could be no community of mind. He knew that for hundreds of years it had been the custom of traders and white trappers to take to themselves a squaw from a tribe of friendly Indians, sometimes for the sake of commercial advantages, sometimes for defence, sometimes for domestic convenience, rarely for love. But there his education, which would have served him well in an older land, stood in his way, as it had so often done, making him over-delicate.

He could find it in his heart to wish himself more ignorant and less refined. That glamour of intellectual gentility, which England sets such store by, had made him unfit for the outdoor brutalities of northern life. In his catastrophe he knew that he was not single, though there was small consolation in that; all through Canada he had encountered younger sons, drawing-room bred young gentlemen, who worked in lumber camps, on railroads, and in mines by day, and spelt out their Horace from ragged texts by brushwood fires, beneath the stars, or in verminous shacks by night. Their power to construe a dead language served to differentiate them from their associates, and, rather foolishly if heroically, to bolster up their pride.

But, to return to Peggy, what a pity it was that she had insisted on the marriage ceremony! Yet, he respected her for that. *But*, and there was always a but in Granger's reasonings, suppose he should get his chance to return to England one day! And this would certainly happen to him on his mother's death. And

suppose, when he had tethered himself to this half-breed wife, he should get word that Mordaunt was still alive! Granger was always at a loss when the moment for decision presented itself; he was too moderate, too far-sighted and philosophic to act immediately. It takes an abrupt, coarse-grained man, or a prophet, to handle a crisis efficiently; your man who is only endowed just beyond the average sees too far — and not far enough. The insolent infringement of personality which he had suffered as man and child from his mother's unwise interference had caused him to become a chronic hesitator. As usual, in this case as in all others, he determined to let matters slide, to give circumstance an unfettered opportunity to evolve its own event. He was content to remain the spectator of his own career, allowing Chance to be the only doer of the deeds which went to make up the record of his life. And what would Chance do next? The Man with the Dead Soul might return at any hour from his winter's hunt, bringing with him his daughter, in which case most surely his book of life would commence to write out its latest chapter of disgrace.

Beorn had cached a canoe at the mouth of the Forbidden River, and therefore would reach the Point up-stream from the northward. Granger found excitement in the thought that any minute, looking out from his window, he might discover the approach of his future wife. The more he allowed his fancy to dwell upon her, the more pleasant her image became for him. After all, there is always something of romance, at first at any rate, in marrying out of your blood heritage. Pizarro must have felt that when he took to himself Inez Huayllas Nusta, the Inca princess. The havoc of

affection which was being enacted secretly beneath the shadow of the forest trees urged him on, crying, "Take your pleasure while it is yours, winter will return. Short views of life are best." Having listened to that advice for several days, he allowed himself to be persuaded. It seemed to him, when he remembered how they had parted, that it would be a gallant and reconciling act to set forth to meet her. Moreover, though the mind that was in him stood aside from the project in disdain, the body cried, "Forward! Forward!" in chorus with the song of the wild-wood.

Early one morning he carried down his canoe to the water's edge, loaded it with a week's provisions, padlocked his store and set out. As the prow drove forward down-stream, exultation entered into him. He was playing at saying good-bye to his long exile; miles ahead lay the Hudson Bay, and beyond that England. If his boat were not so frail and his arms were stronger, by pressing on and onward he could escape. These were scarcely the thoughts with which a man should set out to meet his bride. Desires to meet and avoid her alternated even now, when with each fresh thrust of the paddle he approached her nearer presence. Yet, even to his way of thinking, there was something epic in the situation — that this girl of an alien tradition and a savage race, with her copper skin, and blue-black hair, and timid eyes, should be threading her passage up her native river, through the early summer, toward her western lover who was hastening down the self-same primeval highroad to meet her. Oh, he would be very happy with Peggy! Thus imagining himself on through the labyrinth of passionate fancy, he floated down stream, shrouded in the morning mist. He had to go

slowly, for he could not see far ahead, and travel by water was still treacherous by reason of belated floes of ice. Over to the eastward the sun winked down on him with a dissipated bloodshot eye, knowingly, with the cruel misanthropic humour of a tired man of the world who, regarding idealism as a jest, had guessed at the purpose of his errand and was eager to declare his own shrewd cleverness.

And if the sun is a cynic, who can blame him? He alone of created things has an intimate knowledge of all live things' love affairs, from when Eve shook back her hair and lifted up her lips, to the last girl kissed in Japan. The canoe drifting out of a scarf of mist brought Granger in sight of the bend, where Strangeways had been drowned. He plunged his paddle deeper in the water, thrusting it forward to stay the progress of the prow, and glanced from side to side, then straight ahead. He had caught the smell of burning. On the northern side of the bend, curling above the trees, he could detect the rise of smoke. Someone had lit a fire and was camping there. But who? Was it Beorn and Peggy? No, they would not camp so near their destination; they would have pushed on to the store for rest. Nor could it be men from the Crooked Creek coming up to God's Voice; the season was as yet too early for them to be expected. Then, was it Spurling?

Paddling out into the middle stream, he stole beneath the farther bank, and, rounding the bend, came in sight of two men, the one seated upright before the fire cooking his bannocks, the other stretched out twenty paces distant at the edge of the underbrush, completely covered with a robe, motionless as if he slept. The man who was awake looked up, shaded his eyes, then rising to

his feet came down to the water's edge and waved his hand.

Granger recognised in him his friend Père Antoine, the gaunt old Jesuit of Keewatin. No one could remember, not even the Indians, at what time he had first come into the district; he seemed to have been there always and was of a great age. Yet, despite his many years, he could travel miracles of journeys in the name of Mary's son. It was said of him that he was always to be seen mounting the sky-line in times of crisis and temptation; that he knew by instinct where men were in spiritual peril, as the caribou scents water; that he had often broken out of the forest unexpectedly in time to prevent murder. There were Indians to be found who would circumstantially assert that they had met with Père Antoine, five hundred miles distant from the spot where he had last been seen, walking in the wilderness radiantly, wearing the countenance of Jesus Christ.

Granger recalled these legends as he gazed toward the camp; he watched the figure of the sleeping man — and he thought of Spurling. Was this Spurling? He tried to make out the man's identity by his figure's outline, but the robes which were piled above him forbade that. Yet within himself he was sure that his guess was correct. What was more likely than that Antoine should have met the fugitive wandering up the Forbidden River, perhaps sick and starving, should have taken his confession and compassionately have brought him back? Probably it was Antoine's purpose that they two should be reconciled. He might even have converted Spurling and have brought back God into his life, so that now he was willing to return to Winni-

peg to give himself up, and to take his chance of death.

Having run his canoe aground between the bank-ice, he stepped out and grasped the Jesuit's hand.

"God has arrived before you this time, Père Antoine," he said, jerking his head in the direction of the sleeping man; "he has already done your work. I have promised Him that I will do no harm to your companion, so you have arrived too late."

"If it was God who arrived," he said, "I am content."

He spoke significantly, hinting at a further knowledge of which he supposed Granger to be possessed.

"If it was not God, then who else?"

"Ah, who else?"

Granger, in common with most white men of the district, had fallen into the Indian superstition that Père Antoine was omniscient; it came to him as a shock that he might be unaware of how God had written on the ice. Usually in talking with the priest he took short-cuts in his methods of communication, leaving many things understood but unmentioned, as a man is wont to do when conversing with himself.

"There is no doubt that it was God," he said; "He did not want me to murder this man. He wished that I should leave him alone, to be judged in the forest by Himself. Therefore, if you have brought him here with you to make us friends, I will not do that; but I will promise you, as I have promised God, that I will not be his enemy."

Antoine tapped him on the arm gently, looking him full in the face with his grave, penetrating eyes: "And did not God Himself arrive too late?" he asked.

Granger flushed hotly, for he thought that he detected an under-tone of accusation in the way in which those words were uttered. "Tell me, is he dead?" he asked abruptly.

"He is dead."

"Is it . . . is that his body over there?"

"You should know best."

Involuntarily Granger sank his voice, now that he knew that that sleeping man was dead. He pressed closer to the priest and commenced to whisper, now that he knew that no noise of his, however loud, could disturb the rest of this man who would never wake. Sometimes, when in the hurry of his speech his voice had been by accident a little raised, he would cease speaking, lift up his head, and peer furtively from side to side, then over to where the dead man lay, to make certain that he had not stirred, — all this lest someone in that great silence should have heard what he had said. Thus does the presence of the dead accuse living men, as if by our mere retention of life we did them injury. Wheresoever we encounter them, whether in the hired pride of the vulgar city hearse, or in the pitiful disarray of bleached bones and tattered raiment strewn on a mountain-side, they make even those of us who are remotest from blame feel guilty men.

"But, Père Antoine, I did not kill him," Granger was saying. "I was gravely tempted, but God wrote upon the ice and stayed my hand. This man was once my friend, and is now again — now that he is dead. Let me uncover and look upon his face."

But the priest withheld him. "Not yet—not yet," he said. "Let us first talk together awhile, that I may hear what has happened, and get to understand."

So there in the quiet of the early morning, with nothing to break the stillness save the crackling of the fire, and the flowing of the river, and the occasional flight of a bird, Granger told the priest all his story, from his first dream of El Dorado to the thoughts of escape and of Peggy Ericsen which he had had, as drifting down-stream, he had caught the smell of burning and come in sight of the bend. It was a true confession; nothing to his own discredit was left out.

When he came to an end the mist had lifted, and the sun rode high in the heavens disentangled of cloud. All the time that he had been speaking the priest had sat motionless, with his head bent forward listening, his knees drawn up and his arms about them. Now that the tale was over, he slowly turned his head; and then it was for the first time that Granger knew what the Indians meant when they said that they had met with Père Antoine in the wilderness, walking radiantly, wearing the countenance of Jesus Christ. There was such a brightness about him that he could not bear his gaze, but trembling with a kind of fearful joy fell forward on his face, covering his eyes with his hands. And still the priest said nothing, not trusting himself to speak, perhaps, so great was his compassion.

But it was not long before Granger was conscious of a hand, hard and horny and ungentle, as far as outward circumstance could make it so, which rested on his head. At last he spoke. "I think I understand," he said, and then, after a pause, "but you will never help yourself or the world by merely being sad. No man ever has."

When Granger answered nothing nor lifted up his head, he spoke again. "Does that seem a strange

judgment to pass on you here in Keewatin? Does it sound too much like the speech of a city man? Nevertheless, it is because of your flight from sadness that you have met with all your dangers. All your life you have spent in striving to escape from things which are sad. Why did you dream of El Dorado when you were in London? Because, as you yourself have told me, exquisiteness of dress did not reassure you of another's happiness; you were always remembering that a decent coat may sometimes cover cancer. You are one of those who suffer more because of the sores of Lazarus than Lazarus himself. That is well and Christlike, if you suffer gladly—which you do not. So you left London and travelled half across the world to Yukon, only to find a greater wretchedness; for your misery growing vicious pursued you, and goaded you on to crime. Once more to escape you left Yukon and came to Winnipeg, and came up here, and still you are sad. Will I tell you why? Always, always you have depended on yourself for escape and rest. That is useless, for your sadness does not belong to any city, or any land; it is within yourself. Wherever you have travelled you have carried it with you. You must look for help from outside yourself."

Again he paused, but Granger did not stir. Then he repeated, speaking yet more gently, "I am an old man and have lived in Keewatin the length of most men's lives, yet I have not always lived up here. I was not always happy, and I say to you, you must look for help from outside yourself."

Then Granger answered him, keeping his head still bowed.

"Where, where must I look for help?"

"Lift up your head."

He obeyed, and the first sight he saw was the face of Père Antoine bent above him. Again he was struck with its likeness to the traditional face of Christ — but the face was that of a Jesus who had grown grey in suffering and had been often crucified, who was very ancient and had not yet attained his death. Then he thought he knew what le Père had meant by saying that he must look for help from outside himself. He turned his eyes away and gazed into the sunshine, and on the greenness of the awakened country. Somehow it all looked very happy and changed from what it had been before they two had met. He vaguely wondered whether already he might not be now experiencing that help. But, as had always happened to him after tasting of a momentary joy, in turning his head he found a new grief awaiting him, for there, twenty paces distant, stretched out at the edge of the underbrush, covered with a robe, he caught sight of that recumbent figure, lying motionless as if it slept. He shuddered, and seizing the priest by the arm, speaking hoarsely with suppressed excitement, exclaimed, "Where did he come from? But where did you find him?"

"I found him stretched out on the bank-ice, awaiting me as I paddled up-stream toward the bend."

"Then he was coming back. God must have met him down there on the Forbidden River and have spoken with him face to face; he could not endure His voice, so he fled. Oh, to come back at such a season, when the river was in flood, he must have been terribly afraid. He must have clambered his way up-stream, all those hundred miles, running by the bank. Père Antoine, you know many things, what kind of words

were those, do you suppose, that God spoke to Spurling?"

"The kind of words which God always speaks to men; He told him the truth about himself."

"The truth about himself? There are few who could endure to hear that."

"Yes, He would accuse him with a question, I think."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because that is the way in which God usually speaks to men. He asked Adam a question, and Adam hid himself; he asked Cain a question, and Cain became a vagabond in the earth."

They sat in silence awhile, and then Granger said, "And if God were to speak to me, what question would He ask?"

"I think he would say, 'John Granger, by how much are you better than Spurling, whom you condemn?'"

"You are right; yes, I think He would say that. Even I have asked myself that question before to-day."

"You did not ask yourself; it was God's voice."

"And I could give no answer to what He said. Père Antoine, before we met, I had often wondered what I would say to Spurling should we meet again. I had planned all manner of kindly phrases to make him again my friend; but I had thought of him as coming to me prosperous, with the approval of the world. When he came to me in poverty, asking help, in peril of his life for a sin which had been almost mine, I turned him away. He had chosen me out from among all men between Winnipeg and the Klondike, as the only one to whom he could safely go for help; and I turned him away. I see it clearly now; God sent to me this man whom I had wished to murder, when he had performed

my crime, that, by endangering my life for his, I might cleanse myself. When all men had failed him, he and God expected that I, at least, would understand. But for Mordaunt, I might have had to flee as he fled, changed by the raising of a gun and hasty pulling of a trigger into a Judas to all that is best; I might have had to support within me his utter solitariness and agony of mind, and have been compelled to see myself as debased throughout and forever by a single, momentary act. How he must have suffered! I shall fear to die now; till now I have been afraid only of life."

"Why will you fear to die?"

"Because I shall meet with Spurling, and then I shall hear God's question and His accusing voice."

The priest laid a hand upon his shoulder gently. "Ah, my child, but you forget," he said; "in the country where Spurling has gone he will have learnt how to understand."

That thought was new to Granger, that of the two faults his own was the greater and that forgiveness belonged to Spurling. He sat motionless for a long time arguing it out; he wanted to be exactly just to both Spurling and himself. The fire died down and Père Antoine threw on more brushwood; the sun grew tall in the heavens and a rain cloud gathered in the west; the floe-ice caught in its passage round the bend, gasped and whined and, tearing itself free again, vanished down river out of sight. The arithmetic of the problem stood thus: Spurling's sin had been the result of a sudden violence, his own of a conscious and premeditated uncharitableness. Which sin was morally the worse, to shoot a fellow creature in a fit of passionate desperation, or to turn your back upon a bygone benefactor who

comes to you in distress, comes to you when his heart is breaking, because he can trust himself with no one else? "My sin is the greater," Granger told himself, "I am more wrongful than wronged against"; his thoughts going back to what le Père had said, he added, "I am Cain, and yet I judged Spurling as if I had been God Himself."

He was roused from his meditation by a dull thudding sound which had commenced behind his back; turning his head, he saw that Père Antoine was already digging a grave. Rising without a word, he began to lend a hand. They had not gone far when they found that the ground was hard as granite, that it had not yet thawed out; then they commenced to look for stones to pile upon the body so that, since the grave would be shallow, they might raise a mound above it to prevent the wolves from getting the body out.

By the time they had completed their preparations the rain was falling in large and heavy drops, and the storm was blowing in great gusts through the forest, causing the young leaves to shudder and whisper together, and to turn their backs to the wind. The priest and the trader stood upright from their work and gazed at one another. Already the narrow hole, which they had scooped out, was filling with water; there was no time to lose; yet neither seemed inclined to hurry. At last Père Antoine said, "So you are sure that you did not do it?"

"I cannot be sure of that."

"Ah, but you did not do it in the way I mean? You did not kill him with the strength of your hands?"

They went together to the edge of the underbrush where the dead man's body lay, and carried it, without

disturbing the coverings, to the side of the grave; there they set it down.

"I cannot bear that he should lie in that dampness," Granger broke out; "I remember when we were in London, how he used to hate the wet. Coldness he could put up with or the hottest sunshine, but he could not endure the damp. He said it made him feel as though the world was crying, like a dreary woman because her youngest child was dead. We can't drop him into that puddle and leave him there."

He commenced to strip off his clothes, and to fold them along the floor of the grave. When he had apparently made all ready, he stooped down again and smoothed out a ruck, lest its discomfort should irk the dead.

"Now," he said, "let me see his face for the last time, for he was my friend."

Le Père bent down, and drew the coverings back to the waist, while Granger leant over him in his eagerness. The body, having lain upon the ice, had been well preserved, no feature had been disturbed; but it was not the body of a man who was newly dead, nor was it the face of Spurling. So absorbed had Granger been by thoughts of the comrade whom he had treated harshly, and by the mysterious meaning of the writing which he had seen upon the ice, that the likelier solution of the problem of this man's identity had not entered into his head, that the body might be that of Strangeways, thrown up by the back-rush of the current around the bend.

"Strangeways," he muttered, "it is Strangeways." And with those words his charity towards Spurling began to ebb.

Père Antoine, when he heard it, realising that these were the remains of an officer of justice, for whom, when he did not return, search would be made, and not of an escaped murderer with a price upon his head, at news of whose death Authority would be glad, went down on his hands and knees and began to examine the clothing of the dead for proofs of his identity, which could be sent in to headquarters for the establishing of his death. He foresaw that there was need for care; when the matter came to be investigated, it would be discovered that Granger had been Spurling's partner in the Klondike; questions would certainly be asked of Robert Pilgrim, as Hudson Bay factor and head man of the district, concerning Granger's conduct in Keewatin, and no good word could be looked for from that quarter. That which would tell most heavily against him would be this fact, that two men, separated by a few hours, were known to have passed God's Voice en route for the independent store of Garnier, Parwin, and Wrath, the first a hunted criminal, the second an officer of justice — the criminal had escaped and the officer was dead. Presumably both pursued and pursuer had arrived at Murder Point, for the body of Strangeways, the follower, had been found a mile down-river below the Point. Then where was Spurling? And how had he managed to escape, if he had not been helped? Who could have helped him save Granger? And why was Strangeways dead?

These were some of the many questions which avenging justice would be sure to ask, and, however skilfully they might be answered, the priest knew well that it would be difficult to prevent suspicion from attaching to a hated independent trader, especially when it became

known that he had once been the fugitive's friend. Why, he himself had suspected Granger at first!

His present purpose was, if possible, to gather such proofs from the dead man's clothing as would exclude the doubt of foul play, and establish as a fact Granger's assertion that the corporal had arrived at his death by the accident of drowning.

In the meanwhile, he was not meeting with much success in his search, for the right arm of the dead man was pressed so rigidly across his breast that it could not be moved without breaking; the hand was concealed and the fingers tangled in the folds of his dress, as if even in the last moments of life he had been conscious that he kept a secret hidden there. Only with violence could it be forced aside, and to this the priest was averse; he commenced to cut away the clothing, above downwards from the neck, below upwards from the belt. The cloth ripped easily, having become rotten with the wet, but the trimmings of fur were tough and obstinate to separate. When he had slit the capote and under-garments above and below the arm in two big flaps, he rolled them back, laying bare the breast, where he discovered a silver chain which went about the neck, the pendant to which, wrapped in the portion of the dress that had covered it, was clutched in the icy hand. He now cut away the stuff from around the hand, and, with a severity which seemed both profane and cruel, bent back the fingers one by one, compelling them to release their hold, so that the bones were heard to crack.

"What are you doing?" cried Granger, angrily, being roused by the sound from an unsatisfactory examination of the mixed feelings which had arisen within him

on discovering that Spurling, whom he had just been regretting, was not dead. "Why must we torture him? Why can't we leave him alone, and lay him decently in his grave?"

"Perhaps in order that we may prevent you from being hanged."

"From being hanged! You mistake me for Spurling, Père Antoine; your memory must be failing. What have I done to deserve such courtesy at the hands of Fate? Why should men want to hang me?"

"For the murder of Strangeways."

Granger stood back, and drew himself erect, as if by asserting his physical cleanness and manhood he could refute the accusation. He lifted up his head and gazed with a fixed stare on the landscape, seeing nothing. Yes, it was true, they could make that accusation; there was sufficient evidence for suspecting him and, with the aid of a few lies and inaccurate statements on the part of his enemies — Robert Pilgrim, for instance, and Indians whom he had offended — sufficient evidence might be got together to bring him to the gallows. A fitting ending that for the son of the ambitious mother who had stinted herself and planned for his success, and a most appropriate sequel to the example of reckless bravery set by the last two generations of his father's house!

Dimly, slowly, as he stood there in the northern icy drizzle, with his eyes on the muddy river hurrying toward its freedom between jagged banks, he came very wretchedly to realise that there was only one way in which he could save himself, a way, albeit, which both his loyalty and honour forbade, by becoming ardent in the pursuit and effecting the capture of Spurling,

that so he might prove his innocence. An emotion of shame and self-disgust throbbed through him that it should have been possible for him, even for a moment, to entertain such a coward's thought as that. He shook himself free from temptation and looked about. What was Père Antoine doing? What had he meant by saying that he was perhaps preventing him from being hanged? Did he still believe him to be guilty, as he had evidently done at first?

Père Antoine was intent upon his undertaking; when asked, he only shook his head, saying, "If I believed you guilty, why should I endeavour to find the signs which will prove you innocent? Would I do that, do you think, if I believed you to be a guilty man?"

Granger was softened by those words; they meant a great deal to him at such a time, spoken as they were curtly by one who was so eager to rehabilitate his character before all the world that he had no moments to waste in argument. They were far more convincing to him of the true opinion which le Père held of him than an hour consumed in apology, which would have been an hour spent in idleness. He came and knelt down by the side of the priest, and gazed on the results of his work. He saw the cold white face of Strangeways with the eyes set wide, staring upwards at the clouds. Their gaze did not seem to concentrate as in life, but like that of a well-painted portrait, while the eyes themselves remained fixed, wandered everywhere. Yet, when he settled his attention upon them, they seemed to look at him alone as if, since the lips were silent, they were trying to speak those words which the body had come to utter; if he turned his head away for a moment and then looked back, they seemed themselves

to have changed their direction and to be staring again incuriously out on space, having abandoned hope of delivering their message. And he saw the naked throat and neck, and the marks where the teeth of the yellow-faced husky had clashed and met; last of all he saw the silver chain and the pendant attached, which Père Antoine had at that moment succeeded in freeing from the cold clenched hand.

"What have you there?" he asked.

"I don't know yet. Lift up the head, so that we can slip the chain over and find out."

Granger did as he was bidden; but, as he stooped to his task, he was horribly conscious that the dead man's eyes were intently fixed upon him, as if they knew and lived on, though every other part of the motionless body was dead and ignorant.

"Well, here it is. It's a locket."

Granger started up from the ground trembling. "Père Antoine, do you think we ought to look at it?" he said.

"Why not?"

"Look at the eyes of that dead man."

"They seem to me to be saying 'yes.'"

Granger looked again, went near, bent down and looked carefully; then he turned his head. "You are right," he said; "I also think they are saying 'yes.'"

The priest put the locket in his hand. "It is for you to open it," he said.

It was of gold and studded with turquoise, a woman's trinket and old-fashioned, the chasing being worn flat in places; the silver chain was common and strong, and had evidently not at first belonged to it, being of modern manufacture — probably a comparatively recent pur-

chase. Granger looked it over critically, but could get no hint of its contents from the outside. On the front was engraved a monogram J. M., and on the back a coat-of-arms. The lines of the monogram were distinct and sharp to the touch, they must have been cut many years after the locket itself was made, but the coat-of-arms seemed contemporary with the rest of the chasing. He tried to open it, but the dampness had caused it to stick, so that he broke his nails upon the fastening. He took out his knife and attempted to lever its edges apart with the blade. At last, growing impatient, he set it on its hinges upon a rock and commenced to hammer it with a stone. At the third blow the fastening gave, and the sides fell apart. He could see that it contained a miniature, and, on the other side, a lock of hair; but the glasses which shut them in were mist-covered. He rubbed them clean on the lining of his coat and looked again.

The portrait was that of a young girl, fresh and innocent, about eighteen years of age; her hair, worn loose, all blown about, fell upon her neck and shoulders in long curls; her eyes were blue and intensely bright; her face was animated, with a certain dash of generous spirit and healthy defiance in it, which were chiefly denoted by the full firm lips and arching brows — and the face was the face of Mordaunt. For the first time, he saw the woman whom he had loved, in her rightful woman's guise. He had often longed that he might do that; it had made him feel that he shared so small a portion of her life that he should know her only by her man's name and remember her only in her Yukon placer-miner's dress. He would have stooped to kiss her lips at that time, had it not been for the presence of the

dead, who had also loved her and from whom he had stolen his treasure. Would his body be able to rest in the grave when thus robbed of the symbol of the passion which had caused its blood to pulsate most fiercely in its life?

Then he fell to thinking other thoughts — of how strangely this knowledge had come to him, from all across the world, by the hand of a rejected lover who was dead. Had this been the secret which the corporal had waited to tell him, thrown up on the ice, lying silent and deserted throughout that month at the bend; had he been waiting only to say, "I hold the knowledge which you most desire in my clenched right hand. Here is her woman's likeness. I require it no longer, now that I am dead?" No, surely he had not delayed for that. Then suddenly he realised that this must mean that the woman herself was dead. He remembered distinctly those last words which Strangeways had spoken, even as though he were now repeating them again aloud, "I tell you if the ice were as rotten as your soul or Spurling's, I would still follow him, though I had to follow him to Hell." And his last utterance had been a reiteration of that promise, "He killed the woman I loved, and he shall pay the price though I follow him to Hell."

This was the fulfilment of that promise; though he himself was dead, he had delayed his body near Murder Point that, with his pale and silent lips and the portrait which hung about his neck, he might urge his rival on in their common cause of vengeance. "I will pray God every day of my life that Spurling may be damned throughout the ages — eternally and pitilessly damned," he had said, and now that the days of his

life were over his body had tarried behind to continue that errand, so far as was possible, into the days of his death. When they had parted that night, a month ago outside the shack, he had told a lie; he had denied that the woman was Mordaunt who had been murdered, and had tried to prove his words by asserting that the body which was found in the creek near Forty-Mile had worn a woman's dress. Now he had come back to silently refute his own statement, and to declare the truth which would stir up anger and give him an inheritor of his revenge.

Here, then, was a new reason why he should become ardent in the pursuit and effect the capture of Spurling, that by so doing he would be behaving honourably by a man who was dead. He saw in it at present, with his cynic's eye for self-scorn and self-depreciation, only an added excuse and more subtle temptation for the saving of himself. "No, I cannot do it," he said. And yet, somewhere at the back of his brain, the monotonous and oracular voice of a wise self-knowledge kept answering, "But you will do it, when you have had leisure to be lonely, and have tortured yourself with memories of her."

It seemed to Granger as though Strangeways himself were the speaker of those words; but when he turned round hotly, prepared for argument, he found that the eyes had become glazed and vacant, and that at last the body was truly dead. It had no need to live longer — it had delivered its message.

CHAPTER XI

THE LOVE OF WOMAN

It was past noon before they had completed Strangeways' burial at the bend. When they had finished, the skies had cleared themselves of storm and cloud, and the sun shone out again. The air was full of earth-fragrance, and the landscape was cool and fresh. Nothing of disorder remained, no sign that a man was dead, save only a mound of piled-up stones and sod, surmounted by a little cross of branches bound together with twisted grass.

Père Antoine had searched the body with scant results, for he had found no more than the warrant for Spurling's detection and arrest, and the fragments of two torn and well-nigh obliterated letters, at which latter he had only glanced up to the present. Nor had he seen the contents of the locket as yet, for when he had asked Granger what was its secret, he had received as answer, "Oh, nothing, only a young girl's face." So he had been foiled in his endeavour to gather materials for the establishing of Granger's innocence, should that be assailed, and had discovered nothing which might be of use in his defence. All he could contribute was his own personal evidence that the appearance of the body, as he had seen it, bore out Granger's account in every detail as to the manner in which Strangeways' catastrophe had occurred, and that his deportment,

when he had charged him with murder, had proved conclusively to himself that there was no ground for such an accusation.

When they had returned to the store and had had supper together, Granger sat for a long while with the locket open before him, gazing intently on the portrait. Suddenly he looked up. "Have you seen Beorn?" he asked. "Do you know whether he is on his way back?"

"I have not seen him."

"Antoine, you must stay here with me until he returns."

"Why?"

"I was on my way to meet Peggy when you met and stopped me; I want you to marry us."

"But why now and at once?"

"Because if we're not married she won't live with me,—and I must do something to break down my loneliness by getting a new interest into my life. If I don't, I shall be always thinking of what has happened, and shall go mad, — in which case it will be the worse for Spurling. I don't want to kill him — at least, not until he has had his chance to explain himself. I'm sure now that it was Mordaunt whom he murdered, but I'm still uncertain as to whether he knew that she was a woman, at the time when he killed her — he may not know even yet. If he did it mistaking her for a man, I might be able to forgive him; anyhow, I can say so now, while you are with me. What I should do and think if I were left here miserably alone, I dare not tell. Yet, if what Strangeways said to me is true, that her body was found at Forty-Mile in a woman's dress, which would mean that Spurling killed her, well-knowing

that she was a girl, why then I would go in search of him, and tell him what I thought about him, and shoot him carefully, and be glad when he was dead."

"But you have promised God to leave him alone with Himself."

"And shall I be the first man who has gone back on his prayers and promises? There's nothing to be gained by talking about it; fate must work itself out. But if you want to understand what Strangeways felt, and what I am still feeling, then look at that."

He handed him the locket. Père Antoine took it and bent above it. At last he said, "Why, she's only a girl . . . and he killed *her!*"

"Yes, and he killed her when her back was turned. Now do you understand?"

"May God help you!" was all that Antoine said. Granger went over to where he sat and, from above his shoulder, gazed down upon the portrait. The face had in it so little that was tragic that it seemed impossible to realise that its owner should have encountered such a death. When the smile upon the painted lips seemed so fresh and imperishable, it seemed incredible that the lips themselves should be now silent and underground.

"I wonder where she lived and what sort of a girlhood she had," Granger said.

"I have here two letters which I found upon Strangeways; perhaps they may tell us something about her."

Père Antoine produced the letters from an oilskin pouch. They were in a pointed feminine hand, and the ink was faded. Granger lit the lamp, for the twilight without was deepening into darkness; spreading out the crumpled sheets on his knees before him, he

read their contents aloud. Across the top, left-hand corner of the uppermost page was scrawled in a rude, boyish writing, "*The first letter she ever wrote me*"; the letter itself had been evidently penned by a young girl's hand. It bore the address of a school in London, and ran as follows: —

DEAR ERIC.

I am very miserable hear and sometimes wonder why I was ever brought into the world. Your Papa was very kind to me once, but why has he scent me away from you? You did not want me to be scent, and so I can tell you all about myself. I am very home-sick hear. I say home-sick, though I have no home; I have always been a stranger in your Papa's house. I suppose I am reely homesick for you. I think it is because you and I are seperated that I am sorry. The girls hear are not always kind; they say that I look as though I had been crying, and then of course I do cry when they say that. But if my eyes are red, I don't care. I want you badly and I'm writting to tell you that. Don't forget to feed my rabbits.

Your loving little friend,

J. M.

The second was marked in the same way, but in a manlier hand, "*Her last letter to me.*"

DEAREST ERIC.

I am so sorry that I am the cause of all this trouble, and that I cannot love you in the way that you and your father so much desire. I would do anything to make you happy save that — play the coward, and say that I love you as a woman should whom you were going to marry, when I do not. I have always been used to think of you as a brother, which is natural, seeing that from our earliest childhood we have grown up together. I thought that you would be content with that; no other kind of affection for you has ever entered into my heart or head.

Your father was very angry with me last night after you went out. He said that I, by my conduct, had led you on to *expect;* believe me, I never meant to do that. It never occurred to me that there was any need to be careful in your presence. The truth is, I have always been an interloper in your home; you will remember how, long years since, when first I went to boarding-school, I told you that . . . (four lines were here undecipherable, being faded and rubbed out). When I look back, I see that in all my life you have been my only friend—which makes me the more unhappy that this has happened. Mind, I don't mean to accuse your family of unkindness; I only say that I, perhaps naturally, was never one of them. If I thought that you would be willing, knowing how I feel toward you, to make me your wife, for the sake of your peace I might consent even to that. But you are not such a man. (Three lines were here obliterated.) Let there be no bitterness between us by reason of harsh words which others have spoken; what has happened must make a difference, but I want to remain still your friend. This recent occurrence seems to make it necessary that one of us should go away—there will never be any quiet in your father's house while we both live there. Don't be alarmed or surprised if you get word shortly that I have vanished.

Yours as ever,

J. M.

To this letter was added a note in Strangeways' hand at the bottom of the page, "*She was not to blame; it was I who left.*"

"We have not learnt very much about her from those two letters, have we?" said Père Antoine. "They are ordinary, and leave many questions, which we wanted to ask, unanswered."

"Yes, they do little more than confirm Strangeways' own statements, and yet. . . ."

"Well?"

"They tell us that her true initials were J. M., the same as those of her assumed name, and the same as those of the monogram on the locket; and they tell us of her great loneliness."

"But I can't see how a knowledge of that one fact — her great loneliness — will help us; it does not reconstruct for us the details of her life so that we can imagine her to ourselves, nor does it contribute anything towards your defence."

"Bother my defence. I don't much care if I am hanged; that would at least be a final solution, so far as I am concerned, to this problem of living. What troubles me at present is, how is this woman feeling about my marriage with a half-breed girl? Now these letters help me; they make me certain that whatever I may be compelled to do at any future time by reason of my isolation, she will not be hard upon me, but will understand. This marriage with Peggy, for instance, looks like a betrayal of her. And though she is dead, I should hate to grieve her in the other world."

Granger paused, and then he added fiercely, "And I'm glad of that last letter for another reason, because it states so clearly that she never loved the other man."

"That can make no difference now."

"But it can," said Granger, rising to his feet, and speaking in a strained whisper, with clenched hands, "I tell you it can. If I thought that she had ever really cared for him, I would shoot myself here and now, that I might be beside her to get between him and her. The thought that he was there with her all alone in the vastness, free to do and to say just whatever he pleased, and that I was shut out, would drive me crazy. Do you think that, if I supposed that he had got his arms

around her over there, I could ever rest — if I thought that she would allow him? One little pull of a trigger, the report of a revolver, which I probably shouldn't hear and in any case shouldn't care about, and the journey would be accomplished and I could be bending over her. It sounds very tempting. But I'm prepared to live out my life like a man, now that I know that she understands. If she hadn't known what loneliness meant, she might misjudge my motives in taking up with Peggy, and might, out of revenge, instead of waiting for me, herself take up with Strangeways before my arrival there."

Père Antoine watched him gravely for some seconds after he had finished speaking; then he said, "I don't think that Heaven is quite like that; but none of us can be certain, perhaps your views are as correct as those of anyone else. When I was a young man, before I came to Keewatin, I should have been angry with any man who had said to me a thing like that — but we come to hold strange opinions in this land where all things, judged by our former standards of sanity, even God Himself, seem mad. At that time I longed to be dogmatic and definite in all my beliefs on religion, and this life, and the after-world — that was why I became a Jesuit, that I might exchange despair for certainty. Now, priest though I am, like you I see one gigantic interrogation mark written over sky and earth — and because of it I am grateful. I have learnt that the whole attraction of religion for the human mind, and the entire majesty of God depend on His mystery and silence, and the things which He does not care to tell. If all our questions were answered, we might lose our God-sense. If we knew everything, we should cease to be curious

and to strive. Of one thing only are we certain, that Jesus lived and died, and that though we live in the uttermost parts of the earth, it is our duty to be like Him."

"And Spurling — if Spurling dwells near us in the uttermost parts of the earth?"

"He also is God's child."

"It is easy for you to talk, Père Antoine; you are an old man, and, being a priest, have never loved a woman yourself."

The stern, grey features of the Jesuit relaxed; he hesitated, then he said, "My child, don't be too sure of that. Perhaps I may be attempting to live this life well only in order that I may make sure of meeting and being worthy of one such woman in the after-world. If that were so, it would be great shame to me, for I ought to be striving to live this life well solely for the love of Christ."

He fell silent, sitting with his head bent forward, his gnarled hands folded on his knees before him. A far-away look had come into his eyes, a fixed expression of calmness, as though they slept with the lids parted. Granger watched the hands, mutilated and ruined, with three fingers missing from the right, and two from the left; and yet, despite their brokenness, he thought how beautiful they were. There was scarcely a part of the priest's body that had not been at some time shattered with service. It had never occurred to Granger that Père Antoine, like most other men in the district, had a past which did not belong to Keewatin — memories of a happier time to which he might sometimes look back with the painfulness of regret. Antoine had been there so long that there was no man who remembered the day when first he arrived. He seemed

as natural to the landscape as the Last Chance River itself. And now suddenly, in an electric moment of sympathy, his past had revealed itself.

Granger watched and waited, hoping that presently he would explain. It occurred to him as a discovery that he had no knowledge of the priest's real name or of his family. At his nationality he could only guess, supposing him to be a Frenchman or a French-Canadian. How incurious he had been! And, in this case, lack of curiosity had meant lack of kindness; he blamed himself. He, like all Keewatin, was ready in time of crisis to draw upon the old man's strength, but beyond that he had never shown him real friendship — he had never been conscious of any desire to hear about the man himself. And now he had learned that this man also had a tragedy, and, like himself, had loved a woman who was now long since dead. He wanted to ask him questions, that so he might make up for omitted kindnesses; but he was restrained when he looked upon the grey dreamy countenance, for it was evident that le Père was wandering in the idealised meadows of a bygone pleasantness — a country which was known only to himself. So Granger returned his eyes to the portrait which he had taken from the dead man's hand, and, gazing upon it, tried his best to fill in the blanks in his little knowledge of the woman he had loved.

He constructed for himself a picture of an ivied manor-house, terraced and with an old-world garden lying round about it, where her childhood had been spent and where she had grown to girlhood. He told himself that there must have been a river somewhere near, and he imagined her as stretched upon its banks in the summer shadows. And he thought of the school-

house in London, and the little heart-weary child who had penned that letter there. He re-read it, and then once again re-read it, suffering the same agony of longing for things irrecoverable which this small creature had suffered years ago, who was now beyond all knowledge of pain. What a mystery it was that across that expanse of space and years her letter should have drifted down to him, from London to Keewatin, carried over the last few yards of its journey in the breast of a man who was already dead. It made him feel less of an exile that a miracle like that could happen — it was almost as though she herself had appealed to him from the hidden world. It made him ask himself that question, which so many had asked before him, "*And are we really ever dead?*"

Père Antoine stirred, rose up and walked over to the window, where he stood in the shadow, outside the circle of the lamp's rays, with his back turned toward the younger man. There was something which he wanted to say, but which he found difficult to express. Granger guessed that, and so he said, "Antoine, you are thinking of *her* to-night. She must have lived very long ago. Was she anything like the portrait of this young girl?"

There was silence. Then, still gazing away from him, his long lean figure blocking out the moonlight, the priest returned, "All white women seem alike to one who has lived long in Keewatin. Yet that face did seem very like to hers; but it is many years ago now, and I may not remember her well. She died; and she was everything that was of worth to me in this world. I begin to fear that she is all that I count of highest value in the next."

"But why fear? I should not fear that."

"Because, being a missionary, with me it should be otherwise. I became a Jesuit through distrust of myself. I knew, when she had been taken from me, that because of my despair, if I did not bind myself strongly to that which was highest, I should sink to that which was worst. And I knew that if I sank to that which was worst, she would be lost to me throughout all eternity. So, in order that God might give her to me again in a future world, I strove to bribe Him; I asked that I might be sent to this hardest of all fields of missionary labour, hoping that thus I might acquire merit. Since then a new doubt has come to haunt me, has been with me half a century; the fear lest the life which I have led may count for nothing, may be regarded as only sinfulness, because I have done God's work for her sake rather than for the sake of His Christ, and that therefore as a punishment to me she may still be withheld. Ah, I have fought against her memory, trying to cling only to God! That has been useless. So I have gone on doing my best for my fellow-men, hoping that He may overlook the motive, and judging only by the work, may give me my reward in the end, — may allow me to be with her."

"Antoine, I am a sinful man and one who is little qualified to judge of God's purposes, but I think that He will grant you your request. But if you, with all your goodness, are banished from her whom you loved most on earth, how can I hope for success?"

Then the Jesuit turned round and faced him. "It was because I feared for your success that I mentioned my own trouble," he said. "You are planning to do a thing which is right in marrying this half-breed girl

— you owe it to her and to God, inasmuch as you have lived with her. But you will be doing her a greater wrong than if you were to leave her unmarried, if, when you have made her your wife, you think only of the dead white woman. When the turmoil of living is over, you want to meet and be worthy of the woman who wrote those letters, you tell me; your best chance of success in that desire is in trying to forget her in this world, by giving all your affection to the woman who is your wife, and trusting to God's goodness to give you the rewards which He knows that you covet after death. Don't make my mistake — it means torture in this life, and, perhaps, disappointment in the next. Be true to the choice which you have made, and leave the rest to God's mercy. I have not been strong enough to do all that I advise, for, though I love Christ, I am shamed into owning, old man though I am, that I more often do His work in the hope of re-meeting with a woman who is dead than out of loyalty to Christ Himself."

"Père Antoine, you do not judge kindly of your own actions as Christ would judge of them; you Catholics, in making Christ God, forget that He also was a lonely man. I think it is not as a God, but as a peasant that He will judge us, having knowledge of what we have suffered — if He judges us at all. It is more likely that He will just be sorry for us, that we ever thought that He would judge us."

"Whether I judge kindly or not, will you try to take my advice? I have told you a secret to-night which never, since I came to Keewatin, have I told to any man. And I have told you that I may save you. Believe me, if you cannot love your daily companions for their own sake in this world, whoever and wherever they are,

you will fail to find love for your own sake in the next — and to love well, whatever you love you must love for itself, and not for any future and mercenary end."

Granger moved restlessly, but remained silent; then he sat still and thought. Père Antoine also said nothing, for he knew that the man before him was reasoning his way toward a decision upon which all his happiness must depend.

But to Granger the problem appeared quite otherwise; it seemed to him that he was being asked to abandon another pleasantness for the sake of Peggy, a half-breed girl, for whom he had been prepared already to sacrifice his career. To be sure, his career was not of much value at present, and didn't seem a large thing to sacrifice; but then, when it comes to giving anything away, even the most thorough-paced pessimist is capable of turning optimist about its worth.

Since he had become certain of Mordaunt's death, he had vaguely planned out for himself a course of spiritual debauchery, though he would not have applied to it such a word. He had expected to marry Peggy Ericsen, and to live with the memory of the woman for whom he had really cared. His wife was to have been the servant of his comfort and desires, and the dead woman the companion of his mind and daily round. So he hoped, by keeping Mordaunt near him in his thoughts, to qualify himself for attaining her after death, and to atone for his apostasy in marrying a different woman while yet on earth. Throughout all his reasoning ran a streak of madness, of which he himself was totally unaware. And now, when he had completed arrangements to his own satisfaction, here came this Jesuit telling him that such a course of action savoured of

adultery, and would probably end in the eternal separation of Mordaunt from himself.

Presently he heard a sound of moving. He looked up. Antoine was standing before him, on the outer edge of the light which was thrown by the lamp, appearing huge and prophetic against the background of dwarfed shadows which crawled over wall and ceiling, crowding behind him. His awe for the office of the man returned to him, blotting out the equality which the past few hours of confession had brought about. Once more he recalled how it was said that le Père had been seen walking in the wilderness, wearing the countenance of Jesus Christ. He looked like that now. Granger, made conscious of his own premeditated wrong-doing, shrank back before him. Yet the words which Père Antoine uttered were very simple: "I am an old man, and I knew what I was saying," was all he said.

Granger rose to his feet. "I'm going out," he said. "I'll return in a little while and give you my decision."

He passed out from the close stale air of the shack into the starlight; he could be nearer God there. A low, leisurely wind was journeying over the forest, crooning softly to itself as it went. Dominant over all other sounds, as was ever the case at Murder Point, the wash of the ongoing river was to be heard — even in winter, when every other live thing had ceased to stir, it was not silent. But now, in the early summer of the northern year, it laughed uproariously and clapped its hands against the banks in its passage, as if the water were calling to the land, "Good-bye, old fellow; you won't see me again for many a century. It was the end of the ice age when last we parted." To Granger the shouting of the river was for all the world like that of

a troop-ship departing for a distant country. "Farewell, farewell," it cried. The sound of its going made him weary with a sense of world-wideness; if he was left behind to-day, when once he had joined himself to a daughter of that country, he would be forever left behind. But he had come outside not to reargue his way over the old ground, but to decide. To do that he must be alone, quite solitary; and there, just outside the shack, he was all too conscious of Père Antoine's eyes.

Slowly he commenced to descend the Point toward the river-bank. As he went, a new desire sprang up within him — to speak with Strangeways; if possible to make a compact and extort some approving sign from that dead man. Stepping into the canoe, he pushed off lightly and set out for the bend. The nearer he drew, the sterner his face became; he was thinking of what he should say, and one has to be careful in what he says in speaking with a man who is dead. Soon he came in sight of the flimsy little cross which they had raised, and saw the stones which they had piled above the body, shining white and grey in the moonlight; then with a twist of the paddle his canoe shot in toward the bank and the prow grated on the ice. Granger stepped out and beached his craft above the water's edge. With slow deliberate steps he went forward till he stood above the grave. There, with his hands clasped behind him and his head bowed, he waited for a few minutes listening, half expecting that something would happen. When nothing stirred, he went upon his knees, as if he prayed, placing his lips so near to the grave that sometimes they touched the stones and mould; and so he began to speak to the man imprisoned beneath the ground.

"Strangeways," he said, "you know everything about me now, and you ought to understand. I want to act fairly by you. I didn't do that in your lifetime; if I had, you might not now be dead. I ought to have warned you about the ice at first, and I ought to have told you the truth about Spurling; then you might have believed me. But I did try my best to save you in the end. Père Antoine says that I may get hanged for your death; but I don't mind that so very much, if I can only act fairly by you now."

He paused to hear whether there was any sound of movement underground; when he heard none, he knew that the dead man was listening and waiting eagerly for what would come next. Crouching still nearer, so that he might narrow the space between them, "Strangeways, are you listening?" he said. "We both loved her, and neither of us won her in this world; but because you are dead, you are nearer to her now than I am. I want you to promise me to do nothing till I have come."

And still when he halted, waiting for his answer, nothing stirred. Presently he spoke again. "I have a reason for asking which, if you remember anything of what you suffered in this life, you should understand. To save myself from madness, I must have a companion, and so I am going to marry a woman of this country. In order that I may live well with her, and even in order to marry her, I must pledge my word to forget Mordaunt while I am in this world. Now do you understand? I cannot pledge my word until you have promised me that you will do nothing until I am also dead." He fell forward over the grave and lay there silent. His brain had become numb; he could fashion no more words — perhaps in the interval which elapsed he slept.

Then it seemed to him that the chambers within his brain were lighted up, so that pressing his face against the crannies and between the stones he could look right down, and see distinctly the narrow bed of the grave whereon the body of Strangeways rested. The eyes of the body were open and the lips were working, trying to say something. By watching the lips he discovered that they kept on repeating, over and over, one word; then he read that that word was *revenge*. "I cannot, I cannot," he whispered. "I have promised God that I will not; and, moreover, to take revenge on Spurling would be to remember her."

Was it that he moved as he slept, or did the thing which he thought he saw actually occur! Some stones slipped from off the mound and, to his eyes looking down into the grave, it seemed that Strangeways' hand began to grope frantically after the locket which had been about his neck, and that, finding it missing, his face became angry and he strove to rise, causing the stones to fall and the ground to tremble.

Granger jumped up, and stood there shaking with his hands clenched and his head thrown back, prepared.

"Will you answer me?" he cried in despair. "Don't you know how I suffer? If you consent to what I have asked of you, give me a sign? If nothing happens, I shall know that you are cruel and do not care."

When he had waited in vain some seconds, he lost his nerve and his courage. Kneeling beside the grave he commenced to weep, smoothing the stones with his hands coaxingly like a child, and whispering, "Give me a sign. Give me a sign. Give me a sign."

Suddenly he paused in his pleading. The rustling of water against a travelling prow, and sound of paddles

thrust in, forced back, and withdrawn, struck upon his ears. He threw himself full length along the ground; he did not want to be discovered there. Stealing upstream from the northward, creeping close in to the opposite bank to avoid the current, came a canoe, sitting deep in the water, heavily laden with furs; the stern-paddle was held by a tall and thickly bearded man, and in the prow, even at that distance and in that shadowy light, it was possible to make out that the second figure was that of a girl. Granger recognised them immediately, and knew that the Man with the Dead Soul and his daughter had returned. He also noticed that Eyelids was not there. They did not see him, but quickly vanished round the bend.

When all was silent and lonely again, Granger arose. "It is a sign," he said. Standing above the grave, before departing he spoke once more with the man who lay buried there. "Strangeways, you may rest quiet now," he said. "Though I cannot revenge her as you have desired, we can both, in our separate ways, be true to her."

He delayed a moment to have what he had said confirmed; but this time no token either of dissent or approval was vouchsafed.

CHAPTER XII

HE REVIEWS HIS MARRIAGE, AND IS PUT TO THE TEST

It was the first week in June; for a fortnight John Granger had been a married man. He was now removed a sufficiently just distance from his bachelorhood to be able to estimate the value of the change which this new step had wrought in his career.

Its true worth to him had been that it had converted him from a Londoner in Keewatin into a man of the Northland. This might mean, though it need not, that he had retrograded to a lower type; at all events it meant that he was robbed of his excuse for considering himself an exile, bearing himself rebelliously toward his environment, and being unhappy. By joining himself to Peggy by the rites of the Roman Church, he had made an irrevocable choice, had slammed the door of opportunity and return to civilisation in his own face, and had adopted as his country a land where no one has any use for money or for time, and where nothing could ever again be of very much importance. He had not realised all that a fortnight ago when, at the bidding of the Jesuit, he had made this girl his wife; but since he had lived in her company he had come to realise. Mercifully there is no situation, however bad, which may not develop the peculiar virtue whereby it can be endured. He had learnt his virtue by observing Peggy, an Indian

virtue at that — stolidity. In a great lonely territory, where men say good-bye to one another for twelve months at a stretch, and sometimes forever, they arrive at a philosophy of life which consists in waiting very patiently and unambitiously for the next thing which the good God may send. To attain this sort of quietness a man must be quite hopeless, for so long as he hopes he is liable to disappointment. Also he must live each day as though it were his first, for to remember things past is to court regret. He must permit himself to know none of the extremes of emotion, either of joy or of sadness; to this end he must consider himself as a non-partisan in life, a careless spectator before whose eyes the groping shadows pass. The traffic of words is a labour, and a more frequent cause of misunderstanding than of interpretation — therefore it is wiser, if peace be desired, to keep always silent. Where a gesture will do the work of a word, let a gesture suffice.

All this Granger had learnt during the fortnight which he had lived with his wife; in watching her, he had studied to forego his former turbulence of mind as a thing most foolish, and had determined to sink down into the dull acceptance of a destiny against which it was profitless to contend — a kind of resigned contentment. If he was to be hanged to-morrow for Strangeways' death, that was no reason why he should disturb himself to-day; if that was to happen, it would come to pass in any case, — nothing that he might do or say could prevent it. The momentary pain of dying is usually much less intense than the hours of cowardly suffering which men bring upon themselves by prevising the anguish of their last departure, so he told himself. So to-day he sat outside his store in the sunshine and

smoked his pipe, the freest and silentest man in all Keewatin, and, he would have had himself believe, the most stably contented.

That night, when he had left Père Antoine and had gone to consult the dead man at the bend, had been the turning-point in his frenzy. It seemed to him, as he looked back, to have happened long ago when he was little more than a child, at a time before his enlightenment, when he had supposed very foolishly that he was of importance to God and to his fellow-men. Now he had come to know that he was of no importance even to himself. He blew out a cloud of smoke and watched it vanish in the air; in other days he would have smiled, but it was not worth the effort now. The relation of that whiff of tobacco-smoke to the unplumbed space, throughout which it would be dispersed, was about the same as that of his present existence to the rest of the world.

When, having said good-bye to Strangeways, he had followed the Man with the Dead Soul back to the store, he had made up his mind to the inevitable, and had been prepared to greet Peggy with a certain display of joy. Before ever he could put his thought into action, his intention had been repelled. As he had drawn nearer to the crazy wooden pier which ran out from Murder Point, he had seen the shadowy shapes of the trapper and his daughter, bending down, unloading their canoe, moving slowly hither and thither through the night. As he had come up, he had hailed them. To his call Beorn had made no reply, had only turned his head and nodded, while Peggy, stooping over a pile of furs, had thrown him the customary salutation of the Cree Indian to the white man, used both on arrival and departure, "Watchee" — which is a corruption of "What cheer."

No other words of greeting had passed between them, and he, when he had landed, had set to work at once to help them with their unlading. When that was finished and the furs had been carried up to the store, they had raised their tent, kindled their fire, brewed their black tea, cooked their bacon, and gone to rest. Granger had so far intruded on their reserve as to ask them to spend the night in his store, but his invitation had been ungraciously refused with a shake of the head.

Next day Père Antoine had married them, after which he had departed, promising, however, to return before the summer was out. Granger had said nothing more to him either concerning Spurling or the death of Strangeways, except to insist that the warrant for the arrest, together with the letters and locket which had been found, should be left with himself; nevertheless, he had been well aware that these things were largely responsible for the hurry of the priest's departure. At first he had not been surprised at the silence of Peggy, for he had grown accustomed to the shy modesty of women who are Indian-bred. The women of Keewatin accept it as their fate that they are born to be subservient to men — to be their burden-bearers. But at the end of a few days, when her demeanour had shown no sign of change, he had become a little curious. In the early part of the year the white blood that was in her had been more manifest, and because of it she had been proud. When she had insisted that he should marry her, if he would live with her, the reason she had given him for her demand had been *because her blood was white.* Since then she had journeyed into the winter-wilderness with the menfolk of her family, like any other Indian or half-breed girl, and in the primeval solitariness of the land

the red blood of her mother had asserted itself; the hand of her native deity had been laid upon her mouth, staying her flow of words, the shyness of the forest-gods had entered into her eyes, and the Lord God of Women had stooped her shoulders, causing her to carry her head less bravely, binding the hereditary burden of the red woman upon her back. She had unlearned in those few months all the conceits of self-respect which she had been taught in the school at Winnipeg, and had reverted to the ancient type from which she was sprung, — the river Indian. Granger, as he watched her, guessed all this, for had not he himself been parted from his old traditions? — and he had not known Keewatin till he was a grown man. Well, these people had lived there longer than he had! They should know what was best suited to their circumstance, he told himself; and so, without questioning or combatting their social methods, he resigned himself to accept their modes of life.

It was a strange wedding that he had had — very different from the kind he had planned for himself in the heat of his passion, when he was a younger man. And this was a strange woman whom he must call his wife — one who worked for him tirelessly with her head and hands, but who appeared to crave for none of his affection, and with whom he could have not a moment's conversation; the exchange of a few monosyllables and signs in the course of a day seemed to be the most that he might expect. Yet, because of her meekness and faithfulness, and her ready willingness to serve, he was conscious of a growing protective quality of love for her. If he could prevent himself from adopting her reticence, he promised himself that he would gather her whole heart into his own by and by.

He did not as yet realise that the mere fact that he could feel thus towards her, when no speech had passed between them, was an indication that she was communicating herself in a more vigorous and sincerer language than that of words. This difference between them, that he expected her to use her lips to explain her personality, and that she, far from imagining that she was silent, believed herself to be in her deeds most eloquent, was one of the few traits remaining to him of the street-born man.

As an example of their reservedness was the fact that, though Eyelids, Peggy's brother, had set out on the winter hunt and had not returned, no explanation of his delay had been forthcoming, nor had Granger summoned up the energy to inquire for himself. On their first arrival he had felt distinctly curious as to his whereabouts. Had he come across traces of Spurling and gone in pursuit of him? Had he heard from some stray Indian that Spurling was an outlaw, with a price upon his head? Had Beorn, having found that his cache at the Forbidden River had been broken into, dispatched his son to follow up the thief and exact revenge? Or was Spurling dead, and had Eyelids killed him, for which reason he was afraid to come back?

For the first few days after his marriage these questions and answers had been continually running through his head; but since he had learnt the lesson that nothing was of much importance, he had almost ceased to care. Why should he trouble to inquire? If he did, he might get no reply; and if he was answered, the probability was that his only gain would be something fresh to worry about. The unreturning of Eyelids was one small detail of the total unreality, the dream which he

had once taken so seriously, which in former times he had called life; and of that dream the arrival and flight of Spurling were the nightmare. No one of all these happenings had ever been — they were unactual: and the chances were that even he himself was no reality.

Beorn Ericsen, the Man with the Dead Soul as he was called, was a fitting tutor to a pupil of this philosophy. Compared with him, his daughter was a whirlwind of words; the lesson of silence, which she taught by her behaviour, she had first learnt from her father on the winter trail — in the presence of his stern taciturnity she appeared a garrulous amateur.

Whence he had originally come, no one had ever persuaded him to tell. On his first arrival in the district, which was reported to have taken place nearly forty years ago, for the first two years he was said to have conducted himself more or less like a normal man. At that time he must have been near mid-life, for he was now well past seventy to judge by his appearance. Even then, on his first coming, something had happened, which he did not care to talk about, which made him glad of the dreary seclusion of Keewatin. It had been generally supposed that he was badly wanted by Justice, for having shot his man in a border hold-up, or for deeds of violence in some kindred escapade.

At any rate, he had set about his living in Keewatin in earnest, as though he had determined to stay there. Having attached himself to the Hudson Bay Company, he soon proved himself to be an expert trapper, and a man who, for his reckless courage, was to be valued. Promotion seemed certain for him and, despite the fact that he had joined the Company late in life, the likelihood of his attaining a factorship in the end was not

improbable. It was then, after he had won the confidence of his employers, that he had taken that journey to the North, through an unexplored country, from which he had come back dazed and dreary-eyed, so that it seemed as though he must have met with some dire calamity in the winter desolation, one from which few men would have escaped alive, which had robbed him of his reason. When they had asked him where he had journeyed, "Far, far," was all he would reply. And when, hoping to satisfy their curiosity by a less direct method, they had questioned him, "What did you see up there?" "Blackness — it was dark," was the most that he would answer them.

Because of these answers there were some who supposed that, emulating Thomas Simpson, he had penetrated into the Arctic Circle and had gazed upon the frozen quiet of an undiscovered ocean. He had wrested from God the secret which He was anxious to withhold, they said, and God in vengeance had condemned him to be always silent. But the Indians explained his condition more readily, speaking in whispers about him around camp-fires among themselves. The last place at which he had been seen by anyone on that journey was at the mouth of the Forbidden River, along whose banks it was commonly believed stretched the villages and homes of manitous, and souls of the departed. The Crees asserted that this was not the first man who, to their knowledge, had wandered up that river and had thus returned. Some few of their boldest hunters had from time to time set out and, roving further afield than their brethren, had likewise trespassed all unaware within the confines of the spirit-land. So they said that Beorn had been to the Land of Shadows, and that, by

reason of his surpassing strength, he had contrived to escape; but that he had left his soul behind him there, and it was only his body which had come back.

From that day he had been known as *The Man with the Dead Soul*. Gradually, as the years went by, the deathly vacancy had gone out of his eyes, but he had remained a man separated from living men. He rarely spoke, but from the first his peculiarities had made no difference to his expertness as a trapper — he was more skilful, white man though he was, than many of the Crees themselves. All the strength which should have been spent upon his soul seemed to have gone to preserving the perfection of his body. For a man of his years, he was surprisingly vigorous and erect — no labour could tire him. This, said the Indians, was the usual sign of bodies which lived on when their souls were dead. He was much feared, and his influence in the district was great; in gaining him as a partisan, Granger had achieved a triumph over Robert Pilgrim, and had improved his status among the native trappers more than could have been possible by any other single act.

Beorn was reverenced as a kind of minor deity; no wish of his, however silently expressed, was ever denied by an Indian. When he had chosen Peggy's mother to be his wife, it had been done merely by the raising of his hand. Straightway the girl's father had driven her panic-stricken forth from his camp, compelling her to go to this strange bridegroom, lest a curse should fall upon his tribe. To her, if absence of cruelty is kindness, he had been uniformly kind. Love is not necessary to an Indian marriage, so she had not been too unhappy. At Peggy's birth, having first borne him

a son, she had died. The little girl had been brought up and cared for by the silent man; the shy tenderness she expressed for him went far to prove that she, at least, had discovered something more vital within him than could be expected to reside in the body of a man whose soul was dead. His sending of her to the school in Winnipeg had shown that he was not so forgetful as he seemed to be of the outside world which he had left. This last act had come as a great surprise to all who knew him; but they had contrived to retain their old opinion of him by asserting that this was the doing of Père Antoine.

Only on rare occasions had Beorn let any of his secrets out; when he got drunk he recovered his power of speech, or, as the Indians said, for a little space his soul returned. This had happened less and less frequently of recent years. It was well remembered by old-timers at God's Voice how once, in the early morning in Bachelors' Hall, at the end of a night's carousal, when the trappers and traders from the distant outposts had made their yearly pilgrimage to the fort bringing in their twelve months' catch of furs, Beorn, under the influence of rum, had risen uninvited, and, to the consternation of his intoxicated companions, had trolled forth a verse from a fighting mining ballad. As well might the statue of Lord Nelson climb down from its monument in Trafalgar Square and, with the voice of a living man, commence to address a London crowd. The verse which he sang ran as follows; to the few who were aware, it solved the mystery of an important portion of his hidden early history:

"The Ophir on the Comstock
Was rich as bread and honey;

The Gould and Curry, farther south,
Was raking out the money;
The Savage and the others
Had machinery all complete,
When in came the Groshes
And nipped all our feet."

When he had completed the verse, he had slowly gazed round and caught the look of amaze which had dawned in the countenances of his drunken associates. He had come to himself and grown sober. Suddenly an expression of intense fear and hatred had shot into his eyes; without saying another word, he had turned his back on the company and gone out into the early morning, floated his canoe, and fled as one who was pursued for his life. That verse had explained many of Beorn's eccentricities to one of those who had heard it, and he had told the rest. Its singing had meant that, sometime in the early sixties, Beorn had taken part in the gold-rush to the Comstock, and had worked and prospected in the Nevada mines.

This was his solitary glaring indiscretion in all the course of his forty years spent in Keewatin. Though he had had many opportunities since then to repeat the event when under the influence of liquor, he had allowed nothing more of any importance to escape his lips. He had never spent much time at God's Voice, only turning up at the end of his hunt to dispose of his catch of furs, after which he would vanish into the wilderness again. He avoided on every occasion and was restless in the company of men. Very rarely was he encountered on his hunting-trips by any of the Indians or trappers. When once he had set out, he was not seen again until he returned of his own choice. The few times that he

had been met, he was far to the northward, about the point where the Last Chance and Forbidden Rivers join, whence they flow on together till they tumble their crowded waters into the freedom of the Hudson Bay. Because it was always in this locality that he had been met, a rumour got abroad that, when his body was not dwelling among living men, it journeyed up the Forbidden River, to reunite with his exiled soul in the habitations of the dead.

Granger had listened to all these reports from time to time, but he had paid small heed to them; he was certain in his own mind that, should he live solitarily in Keewatin for forty years, as Beorn had done, a similar web of legend would be woven about himself. The man's conduct was to him self-explanatory; in his early manhood he had committed some passionate wrong, and had fled into the wilderness to escape the penalty, only to find that the executioner was there before him — the Silence, and that the enduring of loneliness was a more cruel punishment than any that an earthly judge could have measured out. The boat was one and the same which carried Beorn, Spurling, and himself. He promised himself that, by and by, as in the case of Peggy, he would break through Beorn's silence, get to know the man, plunge deep down till he held his heart in his hand.

So he sat outside his store in the June sunlight, oblivious of himself and the passage of Time, lifted high above the strife, and impartially, like an ancient deity, reviewed the lives of men.

On the boarded floor of the shack he could hear the moccasined feet of Peggy moving busily to and fro, as she prepared the meal. They had netted some whitefish over night, so their larder was freshly supplied.

On the edge of the pier, which ran out from the Point, Beorn sat, mending one of his traps. Along the top of the roof perched a row of whisky-jacks, most impertinent of birds, who, when a man has carried his food almost to his mouth, will flash down, light on his hand, and, before he knows that they have arrived, filch away the morsel. Somewhere across the river a whippoorwill kept on uttering its plaintive cry, as it were Beorn's lost soul come back, pleading insistently for permission to take up its residence in his body once again. And over against the farther bank a brood of yellow ducklings swam in and out among the rushes, hidden behind which their mother watched and waited. The noon came on apace, the shadows shortened, and everything grew silent; over forest and river a restful stillness settled down. If the Last Chance would always look like that it would be almost habitable. Had it been placed in any country where there were men, it would be considered beautiful just now. Ah, well, after he had been married a few years, he would have his children running hither and thither, laughing and chattering, about the Point; then it would be in his own choice to make of his environment what he liked. Gazing whimsically forward to such a time he could conceive that, were he given the opportunity to return to civilisation, by some curious turn of the wheel of fortune, he might prefer to stay; that such an opportunity might be possible, it would first be necessary that he should have been acquitted from all suspicion concerning the death of Strangeways.

It was easy to be optimistic on such a day; there was a cleanness of youth about the appearance of this newly awakened world which reacted on the watcher's mind.

Peggy had come out from the shack and was seated on the threshold; even she was conscious of a certain elation, for she was humming to herself one of those endless, tuneless, barbaric Indian airs which only take on the pretence of music when they are assisted by the stamping of many feet, and the clapping of many hands. When Granger turned his head in her direction, she lowered her eyes, and her singing ceased. He had not meant that she should do that; he was merely wondering whether she was really a pretty girl and whether, if he were to take her back with him to England, she would be seen as beautiful by London eyes. London eyes! What had they ever seen that was essentially beautiful and free? They could judge of the latest fashion in hats, and of the proper size of the laced-in waist; but what had they ever seen of the naked, sinuous grace of the human body as God made it and had meant that it should be seen? Of nakedness and simplicity, and all things genuine, the civilised man had been taught to be ashamed. No, no, to-day, in the sunshine, he felt sure that he would not return to the insincerity, artificiality, and the blinkered-eyes of the town, were he given his choice. He wanted to breathe cleanness, and to see God's hand at work, and to be *a man;* in London, or any other city, individuality and all these things would be denied. He could be very happy now, he believed; now that he was not lonely any longer, because he had a wife. He wished that he could find a language in which to tell her these things. But he feared to speak; he knew that as yet, just returned from the winter-trail, she would not understand.

While he had been thinking, she had slowly raised her eyes; she was not looking at him, but northeast,

down-river, toward the bend. Turning suddenly, he caught the direction of her gaze. Glancing down to the pier, he discovered that Beorn's eyes were also turned that way. What were they waiting for? What were they anticipating? Was it the return of Eyelids that made them so expectant? During the past fourteen days he had often caught them thus waiting and gazing, as though stoically prepared for news of whatever kind. He suspected that they had some secret which they were not willing to share with him — this would account to an extent for Peggy's reticence. But what secrets of importance could they have, dwelling as they did on the Last Chance? Probably Eyelids' delay was only a matter of traps and furs which had been cached. Then, as he watched Peggy, he saw a look partly of fear, partly of bewilderment, spread over her face. She glanced down to her father; he was still gazing in the same direction, towards the bend, and she, seeing him rise to his feet and wave his hand, following his example, also rose up and waved. Granger was on his feet immediately, that so he might see more clearly; turning his eyes down-river, he watched steadfastly in the direction in which the father and daughter gazed. He saw nothing that was not customary; it seemed to him that he must have looked too late.

"What is it, Peggy?" he broke out.

She swung round slowly, giving herself time to make her face expressionless; it was evident that she had forgotten his presence in her excitement.

"Nothing," she said, and turning about, passed into the darkness of the house.

Granger did not like it. When there are only three of you, one of whom is your wife, to whom you have

been married only a fortnight, it is not pleasant to be the one left out. He had thought at first that they might be on the lookout for York boats, which might soon be expected to pass by on their way from the House of the Crooked Creek to God's Voice. But one does not wave his hand to a York boat which is not yet in sight. It seemed certain to him now that Eyelids was in the vicinity, signalling to them secret information, which they were eager to keep from himself. Had they stumbled across the grave of Strangeways, and wondered what it meant? A grave more or less in Keewatin does not usually trouble a living man; nevertheless, he ought to have told them about it and have explained about Spurling. He would tell them his secret presently, and get them to tell him theirs in exchange. In the meanwhile, he would watch the bend.

There was no sound of footsteps in the shack. Turning his head very slowly, so that it could hardly be seen to turn, he could perceive the shadow of Peggy out of the tail of his eye from where he sat; she was standing behind the window, a little way back from the panes so that he might not discover her, and she was also watching. If this system of spying were to go on for long, there would soon be an end to his dreams of freedom and marital peace at Murder Point. Already he was inclined to revise his opinion as to what he would do, were he given the opportunity for escape to a becitied and more populous land. The more he thought about it, the more certain he became that he would choose to escape. A half-breed girl who was almost pure Indian in her manners — and Peggy seemed that to him now — could never be a fitting companion for an educated white man. He'd been something more

than a fool to marry her. The entire business was a farce, from start to finish; and then he remembered that nearly every farce ends in someone's tragedy.

He was interrupted in his bitterness by a shout from up-river. While they had been all engaged in watching the northeast, a swift canoe, carrying two men, had stolen in from the west. It was approaching the pier; before he had time to get down, its occupants had landed and were shaking hands with Beorn effusively, emitting low, hoarse cries of "Watchee. Watchee."

As he descended the mound, he scanned their travelling outfit, that he might guess their errand. They carried no cargo, nor was their canoe the broad-built, slate-coloured conveyance of the Hudson Bay Company; it was birch-bark, constructed for speed, and carried in the bow a miniature sail. They must be the bearers of a letter, or of important verbal tidings.

He shook hands with them in silence, nor did he ask them at once to deliver to him their message, well knowing from unhappy experience that to attempt to hurry an Indian is to cause him to delay. Instead, he set about doing them favours, that so they might be the more willing to oblige him. He led the way up to his store and, displaying to them his wares, told them to choose themselves each a present. There were gaudy shawls, beflowered muslin dress-lengths, rifles, watches, clocks, suits of clothing and city head-gear, probably misfits or the refuse of a bankrupt's stock which Wrath had bought cheap, all of them long since out of date; there were even battered dolls and children's toys lying about mixed up with canned goods and groceries — a miscellaneous array. Arranged along one wall were all the implements of the trapper's trade and

the articles of common use, such as kettles, pans, enamel cups and plates, coils of rope, etc. With the inborn thriftlessness of the Indian, at the articles of essential worth they only glanced, after which they turned aside from them. Not until an hour had passed did one of the men make up his mind to take a top-hat for his present, broad-brimmed and dusty, from off which most of the silk was worn — a relic, perhaps, of the outside respectability with which one of the Winnipeg partners had been wont to clothe himself years since, when he went to church and still had hopes that one day he might live to see himself an honest man. But the second visitor could find nothing that met with his approval; now that his companion was owner of the top-hat, he felt that of all things, sacks of flour, rifles, sails, knives, that was the one and only present which he would have chosen. Granger was losing patience, though he did not dare to show it. There were so many tidings which that letter, if letter it was, might contain — news concerning Spurling, Strangeways, his mother, Mordaunt. To cut his suspense short by a few minutes he was willing to pay almost any price. Still the Indian procrastinated and seemed to be more and more inclined to become obstinate and offended. Transgressing the usual rule of a trading-store, he had seated himself on a pile of nets and was striking a match to light his pipe.

Granger gazed round his stock in desperation, endeavouring to discover something, whatever its value, which would be acceptable.

A sudden inspiration came to him. Reaching up to a shelf, he took down an oblong box, about nine inches in length, adjusted several parts of it on the inside,

wound it up with a key which was in the back, and set it on the counter. A whirring, coughing noise was heard, as though a creature hidden inside was clearing its throat to prevent itself from choking; after a few seconds of this, a voice, so thin and whispering that it seemed impossible that it should ever have come from a person who owned a chest, commenced to sing with an atrocious perversion of the vowels,

"Sife in the h'arms of Jesus,
Sife on 'is gentle breast,
There by 'is love o'ershadowed
Sweetly my soul shall rest."

He cut it short at the end of one verse, for he could endure no more of that — the tears were in his eyes. Ugly as the dialect was in itself and often as it had revolted him in former days, there was something hauntingly pathetic about it when combined with religion, and sung in Keewatin by that weakling voice; the London voice, shut up in the mildewed box, was an exile like himself. When he was a child, he had heard his mother sing those words, and that was at a time when he believed in the faith which they expressed. For him there was now no overshadowing God — only a careless, and perhaps unconscious, tyrant.

But he had accomplished his purpose, for the Indian was won over and beaming with pleasure. Gramophones had not been long introduced into the district as articles of trade; as yet only the chiefs and most successful trappers could purchase them. To own one was equivalent to keeping a butler in civilisation. Seeing the greed in the man's eyes, he told him that he

could have it so soon as he had declared his business and delivered his message.

This promise caused the oracle to work. Diving his hand beneath his shirt, the Indian drew forth a pouch which was slung about his neck, and, opening it, produced from it a letter. Then snatching up his plaything, he and his companion, proud in his top-hat, went outside to build their fire, and to make their camp, leaving the trader to himself.

Granger rose up and made fast the door behind them, so that he might be undisturbed. Now that he held within his hand the solution to the problem of their visit, he was willing to postpone the fuller knowledge lest it should make him sad. Sitting himself down on the edge of the counter he drew forth his pipe and filled it slowly; and when that was done, still more slowly commenced searching for a match, found it at last and kindled the tobacco. He looked at the address; it was in Wrath's handwriting, but the envelope bore no stamp — it had evidently been sent up by him in haste over the entire six hundred and eighty miles by private carrier. That meant that the news was important, for such means of transit were expensive. Breaking the seal, he found a letter enclosed, which had been addressed to him in care of Wrath; it also was unstamped, but it bore in the left-hand corner the name of his mother's firm of London solicitors. About it was folded a note from Wrath himself, which read:

DEAR GRANGER,

The enclosed letter arrived here by yesterday's mail. It was accompanied by a letter to myself from some London lawyers, urging me to deliver it into your hands in the quickest possible time, regardless of expense. Carrying out my instructions, I am

sending it up to you by private messengers; heaven knows how long it would take to get to you, were I to send it any other way. Of course I shall dock the cost of its transit from your salary, which means that if you don't have a good year's trade, I sha'n't have much to pay you. Yours,

CHARLES E. WRATH.

His mother's lawyers! That meant that his mother had relented, and was anxious to have him home again. His heart leapt at the thought — and then he remembered that there were Peggy and the death of Strangeways as obstacles to his return.

He undid the wrapping of the lawyer's letter and, as he read, the blood went from his face. It was to tell him, in formal language, that his mother was dead, and that, if he would fulfil certain conditions, he was to become heir to the property which she had left. The estate was valued at fifteen thousand pounds. The conditions were, that he was to return to England within four months from the writing of this letter, and take up his permanent residence there. If for any reason he should be unwilling or unable to agree to these terms, the money was to be divided among certain charities which his mother had named in her will. That was all. So the chance for which he had waited had come at last, and he was unable to take it — and his mother was dead!

He sat very still and motionless. The flies drummed against the panes — they also were captives. Outside, across the river, the whippoorwill continued to cry, demanding entrance into Beorn's body because it was his soul. Peggy came to the door, tried to open it, rattled the latch and announced that the meal was ready: he took no notice of her, and presently she went

away. For hours he sat like a man of stone, making no pretence at thinking; of one fact only was he aware, that with both hands, for the want of a little patience, he had thrown away all his chances of return. He was lost — lost — lost.

As the hours dragged by the flies grew tired of trying to escape, and the whippoorwill of calling; the whole world fell silent. He wished that the darkness might come, so that he might hide himself; but in June time, on the Last Chance River, it is never utterly night. When the sun has sunk from the sky the sunset lingers, gradually working round toward the dawn; through the summer months, as if to make amends for the long dark winter days, it always leaves a little torch of promise burning somewhere along the horizon. The perpetual brightness of the world outside seemed to jeer him; it was as careless in its way as the winter had been of the solitariness of his soul.

But at last the shadows lengthened in the store, and through the dusty, cobwebbed window he could see that the sky had grown indigo and grey. So his mother was dead, and he would never look on her again. They had not understood one another, and now, with whatever longing he might desire it, he could never explain. He had abandoned her for the sake of his father's quest, that he might seek out El Dorado — and this was the wage of his sacrifice, thirty, perhaps forty long years of life at Murder Point, shared in the company of a squaw, a hurried burial one day, and an unnoticed grave.

He could not accept the conditions set forth in the lawyer's letter and return to London in the two months which remained — there were the Mounted Police to

prevent him, and there was Peggy. He had chosen his own path in life, and he must follow it without complaint to the bitter end. He tried to think himself back into the opinion of the morning, when he had fancied that he preferred the Last Chance River to any other place. He could not think that now; he knew that it was no more than a consoling lie. Then he ceased to think and grew drowsy.

He was aroused by the faint and far-away sound of singing. The dusk had gathered and it must be nearing midnight. He was stiff from sitting so long in a cramped position; he rose to his feet and rubbed his eyes. The window was ruddy with the shifting light of the Indians' camp-fire; occasionally, when the flame shot up, its brightness stole across the ceiling and illumined the walls of the store. He listened; the tune that was sung seemed to him familiar and puzzled him, for he was not fully awake. Drifting through the stillness of the northern twilight, at an hour when even the beasts of the forests held their breath because of God's nearness and His solemnity, there reached his ears the vulgar strutting tones of a music-hall singer's voice:

"As I walked through Leicester Square
With my most magnificent air,
You should hear the girls declare
'Why, he's a millionaire;'
And they turn around and sigh,
And they wink the other eye,
'He's the man that broke the bank at Monte Carlo.'"

The coarse suggestiveness of the words, the cheap passions which they implied, the leer and pomposity with which they had been uttered by the comedian, the unhealthy, narrow-chested, pavement-bred audience

by which the effort had been greeted with applause, the total uncleanness and unnaturalness of city-life, came vividly home to him.

He did not stop to reason, or to trace his repugnance to its source — to his native hostility to the impurity and strengthlessness of multitudes of creatures who arrogantly boast that they are civilised — he was too angry for that. He was only conscious that a vain and impertinent echo of the town had, by his instrumentality, found its way into and vilified the secret refuge of God's austerity. Tearing back the bolts from the storehouse door and lifting the latch, he rushed out into the cool half-light.

Half-way between himself and the pier he saw the Indians' camp-fire, with four figures squatting round, two of which were Peggy's and Beorn's. Running down the descent, he burst into their midst, seized the offending gramophone and crushed it down with his heel into the flames. His foot was scorched, but he did not care for that. When his work was accomplished, turning savagely upon his spectators he said, "I'll teach you to offend God's silence," and strode away, leaving them staring after him through the shadows, terrified and amazed. Suddenly he returned; there was a gentler look upon his face. Going up to where Peggy sat, he took her by the hand, and, without a word, led her out of the circle of firelight towards the shack.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEAD SOUL SPEAKS OUT

The Man with the Dead Soul was drunk, heartily and shamelessly drunk; Granger, the contriver of his condition, sat facing him, impatiently waiting to see whether that was true which the Indians said, that, when drink had subdued his body, his soul returned for a little space.

The nominal occasion of the carousal was the home-coming of Eyelids and, as Granger had subtly put it, "the celebration of his own entrance into the family of Ericsen." However, in a country from which there is no means of escape, save through the magic doors of imagination, and where men get so bored with themselves, and their environment, and one another, that they are willing to seek a temporary release by drinking such noxious drugs as pain-killer, essence of ginger, of peppermint, etc., for the sake of the alcohol which they contain, the only excuse necessary for intoxication is opportunity. Spirits of any kind are strictly forbidden in Keewatin, that the Indians may be protected from intemperance; nevertheless, despite all precautions of the Mounted Police, a certain quantity finds its way up in disguised forms, or smuggled in sacks of flour and bales of traders' merchandise.

Granger, being well aware that the fool says with his lips what the wise man knows in his heart, had

determined that both the menfolk of his adopted house should play the fool that night. Whatever Beorn and Eyelids might do or say, and however intoxicated they might become, he had planned for himself that he would keep quite sober, with his wits about him, that he might recall next day what they had done and said when thus taken off their guard. There were two problems which he was anxious to solve; the first, the reason for his brother-in-law's long delay; the second, what it was that they watched for with such eagerness, and waved to at the bend.

The latter problem had become still more perplexing since Eyelids' return that morning, for in the afternoon, when they were sitting together outside the shack, he also had seen something down-river, and, following his father's and sister's example, had risen to his feet, commenced to wave, and, when it had disappeared, had inquired, "Who was that fellow?" Straightway Beorn had scowled him into silence, and Peggy, leaning over, had whispered some words in a Cree-dialect, which Granger did not understand; whereupon an expression of fear and wonder had come into Eyelids' face. When Granger, having taken him apart, had asked him for an explanation, he had only shaken his head stupidly, saying that he must have been mistaken, and that there was nothing there. This was manifestly false, for during all the remaining portion of the daylight his eyes had kept continually furtively returning down-river towards the bend.

The fact that he also had seen something, did away with Granger's supposition that it was to her brother, lurking in the vicinity, that Peggy had signalled with her hand — and made him the more curious to know

the real cause. Could it be Spurling, he wondered, who had made a compact with them and lay in hiding there? If that was so, then what had been the reason of Eyelids' delay, — for he had not stayed to collect any caches of furs, but had come back empty-handed, walking by the river-bank. He had watched to see whether anyone had put out from the store to leave provisions at the bend; but no one had been there, unless at a time when he slept. His passion to share the secret had become all-consuming, as curiosity must when it works in the mind of a lonely man. To this end he had shadowed Eyelids all that day, giving him no opportunity for private talk with his family, and, finally, had prepared this trap of a drinking-bout, hoping that someone might commit himself. As yet he had this to his advantage, that the half-breed, though he had witnessed the signals, was almost as ignorant as himself as to their real purport, and was therefore, probably, just as curious.

They were sitting in a room, empty and comfortless, which was built on to the end of the oblong which comprised the store. Its walls were damp, and the newspapers, with which they had been covered, sagged down from the boards like monstrous goitres. It had one window, which looked riverwards, across whose panes, dust and cobweb smirched, a muslin curtain had been hung by a previous agent, who was reputed to have drunk himself to death. This was its only attempt at decoration, save for a faded photo of a girl attired in early victorian dress, across the right-hand corner of which was scrawled, "Yours, with love, from Gertrude." She looked a good girl, and Granger felt sorry for her because, by the ordinary laws of nature, she had prob-

ably been dead for many years; and he also felt sorry for her because he was certain that the man who had placed her picture there had gone away and disappointed her in her love.

Perhaps he had been the agent who, sitting there night after night, gazing upon her portrait, torturing himself with memories of the happiness which he had lost, had drunk himself to death. If that was so, she had had her revenge. Going closer, he saw that the photographer's name was recorded there, "Joseph Dean, New Bedford, Mass." So she had been a New Englander, and her lover, whoever he was, had probably started life as a sailor in the whaling fleet which at that time set out annually from New Bedford for the North. In Keewatin the memories of men for their neighbours, especially if they happen to be private traders, are very short.

The room contained little furniture. There was a wooden shelf, knocked together out of packing-cases, which ran along one side of the wall and had probably done service as a bed. There was an upturned box, on which a man might seat himself; and a low three-legged stool which would serve as a table — that was all. In imitation of the no more lavish accommodation set apart for single men at the Hudson Bay Company's forts, the room was commonly known as Bachelors' Hall. The door was fast-shut; the curtain was half-drawn before the window, shutting out the long-tarrying June twilight; the three men had been there together for four hours, and as yet nothing of importance had transpired, and no word had been spoken.

Eyelids, with his lashless lids (hence his sobriquet) half-closed, squatted on the floor, Indian fashion, directing his pipe to his mouth with uncertain hand. The

other hand fumbled continually in his breast, as if he kept something hidden there. Granger wondered what it was.

Beorn sprawled his great length of legs along the shelf, his back and head resting against the wall. His eyes were very bright, and a long and ugly scar, which extended from the right of his forehead to his lower jaw, and which Granger did not remember to have noticed before, showed swollen and red through the tangled mass of his grey beard. His pipe also was in his mouth, but his hand was still steady. Under the influence of drink a new intentness had come into his face, all his features seemed to be more keen and pointed. Every now and again he would remove his pipe, as if he were about to break into speech; then, either through laziness or from the tyranny of his habitual caution, he would replace it and, as it seemed to Granger, relapse into memories. He watched him closely, and he thought he saw the elation of old successes, and emotions of forgotten defeats, flit across his countenance. Granger himself was quite sober, having only pretended to drink; if he sat a trifle huddled on his box and lurched unsteadily, it was only that he might keep his companions unsuspicious.

On the crazy little stool between them stood a candle from which the wax occasionally dripped, so that for a moment the flame would die down, causing the shadows to shorten. A jam-jar did service as a tumbler; there was one between the three of them, which meant that they had to drink quickly in order not to keep the next man waiting. Granger served out the whisky, and he served it neat — when men are intent on getting drunk they do not procrastinate by adding water.

Eyelids was getting more and more peaceful and foolish, smiling first to himself and then slily to Granger, as though he had some very happy knowledge which he was burning to communicate. At last he pulled out his hand from his shirt, and there was something in it. Beorn, raised three feet from the floor on his shelf, could not see what his son was doing, nor did he care; he was reliving the past, when there was no Eyelids.

But Granger watched; the fingers opened a trifle and revealed the shining of something yellow. Quick as thought, before the fingers could close over it again, he pretended to lose his balance, and, shooting out his foot as if to save himself, sent the yellow lump flying from the half-breed's palm. It shot into the air, fell with a thud, and rolled scintillating into the darkness across the boarded floor. Before he could be detained, Granger had sprung after it and held it in his hand. He faced round, ready to defend himself; but there was no necessity. Eyelids, having attempted to rise and having found that his legs would not carry him, had sunk back to his squatting position on the floor, where he was smiling foolishly and nodding his head as much as to say, "I've been telling you all evening, but you would not believe me; now I have proved my word!"

Beorn was sitting upright on his shelf, looking at him keenly. As Granger approached, he held out his hand; Granger placed the yellow lump in it.

"Gold," he cried, and his eyes flashed; "a river nugget!" Then weighing it carefully, "Three ounces," he said; "it's worth about forty dollars."

"How do you know that?" asked Granger. "Was it river gold that you found on the Comstock? I thought that it was quartz."

"It was quartz afterwards, but nuggets and dust first." Then, remembering himself, he asked suspiciously, "But what d'you know about it?"

"I ought to know something," Granger replied, speaking thickly and shamming intoxication; "I ought to know something; I was one of the first men in on the Klondike gold-rush."

"Damn it! So you were one of the Klondike men? Tell me about it."

Granger had intended to spin him a yarn about great bonanzas in Yukon, which he had discovered. It was to have been a hard-luck tale of claims which had been stolen, and claims which had been jumped, and claims which had been given away for a few pounds of flour or slices of bacon in crises of starvation; but in the presence of the old man's eagerness, and with the shining nugget of temptation between them, he drifted unconsciously into straight talk and told him his own true story.

At first, while he was feeling his way, he gave the history of Bobbie Henderson, and Siwash George, and Skookum Jim, the real discoverers of the Klondike; and of how Bobbie Henderson was done out of his share, so that he still remained a poor man and prospector when others, who had come into the Yukon years later, had worked their claims, grown wealthy, and departed. Then he recited the Iliad of the stampede from Forty-Mile, when the rumour had spread abroad that Siwash George had found two-dollars-fifty to the pan at the creek which he had named "Bonanza"; how drunken men were thrown into open boats, and men who refused to credit the report were bound hand and foot with ropes by their friends and compelled to go along, lest they should lose the chance of a lifetime; and how,

where to-day Forty-Mile had been a noisy town, to-morrow it was silent and deserted, with none left save a few old men and sickly women to tell the story.

To all of this Beorn listened with small attention, for he kept muttering to himself, "But how did he know that there was gold there? How did he discover it?" Granger wondered to whom he was referring — to his own son, to Siwash George, or to someone else; but he dared not ask him a leading question lest his suspicion should be aroused. He went on with his narration feverishly, forgetting in his excitement his resolution to keep sober, emptying the tumbler of whisky recklessly, turn and turn about with his companion, waiting and watching to see whether, in the Indian phrase, the dead soul would return. When he commenced to speak of himself, of his passage from Skaguay to Dawson, of the wealth which he found and lost at Drunkman's Shallows, and of his flight, Beorn became interested; his eyes blazed and every few seconds he would give him encouragement, ejaculating hoarsely, "Go on. Go on."

So he carried his history to an end with a rush, for now he knew that the dead soul had come back. He finished with the sentence, "And then I went to Wrath, for I was nearly starving. 'For God's sake, man, give me some employment,' I said. 'I can't steal; they'd put me in gaol for that, and so I should disgrace my mother. And I can't cut throats for bread, for then I should get hanged. But, if I have to endure this agony much longer, I shall do both.' And his reply was to send me up here, to this ice-cold hell of snow and silence, to mind his store and watch the Last Chance River flowing on and on, until the day of my death. God curse the reptile and his charity."

The Man with the Dead Soul turned his head aside and there was silence for a moment. Then, bending down and having assured himself that Eyelids was asleep. "I've known all that," he said; "but, unlike you, I did more 'an intend — I killed my man. I guess you an' I are o' one family now, so there's no harm in tellin'. I don't just remember who you are, nor how we happen to be here this night; but you placed that gold in my hand, so I reckon you're all right. You ain't a Mormon, are you?" he asked abruptly.

Granger, taken aback by the question, smiled slowly and shook his head.

"Well, then, I'd have you to know," Beorn continued, "that I was brought up in the Mormon faith. One o' the earliest memories I have is o' the massacre o' the Latter-Day Saints at Gallatin, when Governor Boggs issued his order that we should be exterminated an' driven out. I can still see the soldiery ridin' up an' down, pillagin' our city, insultin' our womenfolk, an' cuttin' down our men. I can just remember the misery o' the winter through which we fled, an' the tightness o' my mother's arms about me as we crossed the Mississippi, goin' into Illinois for safety. From my earliest childhood my mind has bin made accustomed to travellin's, an' privations, an' deeds o' blood. That's the sort o' man I am.

"It was six years after the Gallatin affair, when our city o' Nauvoo had been founded, that the mob once more rose agin us an' murdered our prophets, an' placed our lives in danger. Again we fled, crossin' the Mississippi on the ice, till we gained a breathin' space at Council Bluffs. A year after that, under Brigham Young, we passed through the Rockies to the Great Salt Lake an' came to rest. All this persecootion caused

our people to become a hard an' bitter race; but I'd have been true to 'em if it hadn't bin for my mother, an' the manner o' her death. How did she die? Don't ask me, for I can't tell you. She was a Swede, a kind o' white slave, who was kept with several other women by my father. She went out one day, an' never came back. I believe she'd got heartsick, an' was plannin' t' escape with a feller o' her own nationality, a newcomer. Anyhow, when I asked my father about her, he threatened me into silence. He was a priest o' the order o' Melchizedek, a powerful man among the prophets. From that hour I hated Mormonism, an' determined t' escape whenever my chance occurred. It came sooner 'an I expected.

"The Californian gold-rush had robbed the Saints o' the seaboard to which they was hopin' to lay claim. They began to get nervous lest the southern territories, from Salt Lake to the Mexican frontier, might also be lost to 'em if they didn't do somethin'; so they organised the State of Deseret, an' sent out expeditions to take it up before it could fall into the Gentiles' hands. My father, I believe, had grown 'fraid o' me, lest I should take his life; so he had me included in the first expedition, which consisted o' eighty men, an' was sent to garrison a Mormon station in Carson Valley, Nevada.

"I've allaws had a nose for gold, an' we hadn't bin there a month before I'd discovered an' washed out a little dust from a neighbourin' gulch. I kept my secret to myself, an' when I'd gathered enough, bought provisions, stole a horse, an' ran away, escapin' over the Sierras into California, where I hoped that the Mormons, an' especially my father, would lose all trace o' me an' give me up for dead. For eight years I drifted along the

coast from camp to camp, but didn't have much luck. I even went so far south as Mexico, where I laboured in the silver mines an' learned the Mexican method o' crushin' quartz with arrastras.

"All this time I was haunted by the memory o' the gold which I'd washed out in Carson Valley; the more I thought about it, the more certain I was that untold riches lay buried there. However, I was fearful to return, lest I should fall into the clutches o' the priesthood o' Melchizedek or o' the spies o' Brigham Young. I was an apostate, an' my father was my enemy; I knew that, should I once be recovered by the Mormons, no mercy would be shown me. At last the news came that the struggle o' the Saints for possession o' Nevada had been given up, an' that messengers had bin sent out from Salt Lake biddin' all emigrants return. For eight years I'd bin unmolested; I thought that I'd bin forgotten, an' that it was safe to turn my steps eastward.

"I travelled day an' night to get back to my first discovery; I was tortured wi' the thought that before I got there someone might have rediscovered it, an' have staked it out. I'd crossed the Sierras, an' was within a two-days' journey o' my destination, when I came to a lonely valley as the sun was settin', an' there I camped. The place looked God-forsaken; there was nothin' in sight but rocks, an' sand, an' sage-brush. I lit my fire, an' tethered my horse, an', being dog-tired, was soon asleep. Suddenly I woke up, an' was conscious o' footsteps goin' stealthily away from me into the darkness. I jumped to my feet an' seized my gun; but my eyes were dazed with sleep an' firelight so that I could see nothin'. I ran out into the shadows, followin' the footsteps, but, before I could come up with 'em,

their sound had changed to that o' a horse, gallopin' northward, growin' fainter and fainter.

"I returned to my camp an' examined my baggage; nothin' was missin', not even the gold which I'd carried — all seemed safe. I sat up an' watched till daybreak, an', havin' snatched a hasty breakfast, commenced t' pack my animal. Then it was that I discovered, slipped beneath a strap o' my saddle, a sheet o' paper. Unfoldin' it, I saw that it was scrawled over in a rude an' almost unreadable hand. This was what it said, 'This demand of ours shall remain uncancelled, an' shall be to you as was the Ark o' God among the Philistines. Unless you return to your father's house an' to the people o' your father's faith, you shall be visited by the Lord o' Hosts wi' thunder an' wi' earthquakes, wi' floods, wi' pestilence, wi' famine, an' wi' bloodshed, until the day of your death, when your name shall not be known among men.'

"I was seized with panic, for then I knew that the spies o' Mormon had traced me. But I wouldn't turn back, for I knew that the treasure for which I had waited, as Jacob waited for Rachel, lay straight ahead. So I rode forward, tremblin' as I went, carryin' my gun in my hand. At the end o' the second day I came t' Johntown, an' found that many things had changed since I had left. There were a dozen shanties in the town; these were occupied wi' gamblers, storekeepers, an' liquor-sellers, includin' two white women an' Sarah Winnemucca, the Piute princess. But the placer-miners had been at work, an' the gulches were dotted with the tents an' dugouts o' men who had discovered my secret for themselves. Thomas Paige Comstock was in the gang, the man who gave his name to the first

great strike. They called 'im Old Pancake, 'cause he was too busy searchin' for gold to bake bread. Even at that time, as wi' spoon in hand he stirred the pancake batter, he kept his eyes on the crest o' some distant peak, an' was lost in dreams o' avarice.

"I hadn't bin there long before I took up wi' a feller named Peter O'Riley, an' we became pards. We determined to try our luck in the Walker River Mountains, where some new placers had bin started; but we hadn't got the money, so we agreed t' work a claim in Six-Mile Canon till we'd taken out enough dust t' pay for an outfit. We dug a trench straight up the hillside, by Old Man Caldwell's Spring, through blue clay an' a yellowish kind o' gravel. But the spring wasted down the slope, so we stopped work on the trench an' commenced to sink a pit to collect the water an' make a reservoir. We hadn't sunk more 'an four feet when we struck a darker an' heavier soil, which sparkled as we shovelled it above ground. We washed out a panful, an' found that the bottom was fairly covered in gold. This was the top o' the famous Ophir, had we only known it. We jumped to our feet an' shouted, for it was the richest placer that had as yet bin found. We gave up our notion o' the Walker River, an' I began to laugh int' myself at the Mormon threat, that I should suffer from all the plagues o' Egypt, an' die an unknown man. We were rich — rich — rich.

"Just as we were finishin' our day's work, Old Pancake rides up. He'd bin lookin' for a mustang that he'd lost, an' came gallopin' over the ridge, with his long legs brushin' the sage tops. We tried to hide our discovery, but his eyes were too sharp for that. He saw the gold from our last clean-up glistenin' in the bottom

o' the pan, as the sunset lit on it. 'You've struck it, boys,' he cried.

"Jumpin' from his horse, he went down into the pit t' examine for hisself. He stayed down there some time; when he come up his face was grave. He'd done a lot of thinkin' in a very short while. He sat down on the hillside, an' was silent for so long that we began to suspect there was somethin' up.

"At last he said, 'Now, see here, boys, this spring was old man Caldwell's. I an' Manny Penrod bought his claim last winter, an' we sold a tenth to Old Virginia th' other day. If you two fellers 'll let Manny an' myself in on equal shares, it's all right; if not, it's all wrong.'

"We were a bit afraid o' Old Pancake; he'd bin longer in the district 'an we had. We didn't think to doubt his word, though, as we afterwards discovered, every word that he spoke was false. Anyhow, after a lot 'o argiment, we agreed to let him an' Manny Penrod in on the terms which he'd suggested. That was the beginnin' o' the Johntown gold-rush, an' I, for the second time, was one o' the discoverers. At first we named the place Pleasant Hill Camp, an' I can tell you it was mighty pleasant to be takin' out a thousand dollars a day per man. But later, when a city commenced t' spring up, it was necessary t' find some other name. We quarrelled a good deal about what we'd call it; but one night, when Old Virginia was goin' home with the boys drunk, carryin' a bottle o' whisky in 'is hand, he stumbled as he reached his cabin, an' the bottle fell an' was broke. Risin' to his knees, with the neck o' the bottle held fast in 'is hand, he coughed out, 'I baptise this ground Virginia town.' An' so Vir-

ginia town, which was afterwards changed t' city, the handful o' shanties was named.

"For all that my prospects were lookin' so rosy, I was really havin' bad luck. Day after day, I was throwin' away wagon-loads o' 'blue stuff,' as all th' other miners were doin', an' as those who had gone before us had done — we damned it, an' didn't know its value. A month after I'd sold out, a feller had some o' it assayed, an' it was found to be worth nearly seven thousand dollars in gold an' silver per ton.

"I guess that curse o' the Mormons was more powerful 'an it seemed at first sight — it's followed me through life an' ruined all the men with whom I've come in touch. Old Virginia was thrown from his horse, an' killed while drunk. O'Riley sold out his share for forty thousand dollars, the bulk o' which he spent in wildcat speculations, so that, what wi' disappointment an' loss, he finished out his days in a madhouse. Penrod sold for eight thousand, an' soon spent everything he had. Old Pancake sold for eleven thousand, an' lost every dollar. Then, gettin' sick o' seein' other fellers grow rich out o' what had bin his, he wandered off prospectin', an' blew out his brains wi' his own gun in the mountains o' Montana. A chap named Hansard, one o' our first millionaires, died a pauper an' was buried at the public expense. As for myself, you can see what I've become — the Man wi' the Dead Soul."

He paused, and looked round at Granger. "*The Man wi' the Dead Soul*," he repeated, "that's what I am. When I die, my name will not be known among men."

"I don't suppose there's any of us'll be remembered long," said Granger. "There's a man out there on

the bend; I was at Oxford with him. He was one of the finest oars that England ever had. The papers were full of him once. A sporting edition never came out but . . ."

He was interrupted. "Pass the whisky," Beorn said; "if we're goin' to be forgot, it don't much matter what we do or have done; an' we may as well forget."

He swallowed the spirit greedily at one quick gulp. "Where'd I got to? Oh, yes, I'd sold out my claim for money down, an' made a fool o' myself. You see I thought that my find was a gash-vein an' would soon peter out, an' that I was doin' somethin' mighty clever to sell at all. Instead o' which, I'd only skimmed the surface an' hadn't gone deep enough. The men who bought from us sank down till they came to the main lode, an' then there was the discovery o' what that 'blue stuff,' which we'd bin throwin' away, was really worth; from them two causes came the Washoe gold-rush. You never saw anythin' like that, not even in the Klondike. It was maddenin' for me to stand by an' watch these men, who'd come from a thousand miles east an' west, just t' handle the pickin's o' the wealth which I had once possessed an' hadn't had the sense to know about. They lived in tents, an' huts, an' holes in the hillsides, an' paid seventy-five cents for a pound o' flour, in the hopes that, when the summer 'ad come, they might get a chance to prospect.

"Before winter 'ad gone, they was leadin' strings o' mules across the mountains, on blankets spread above the snow, that they might get provisions in an' prevent us from starvin'. An' I, the feller as they'd come to rob, had to sit still an' watch it all.

"Before the roads were fit for travel, all the world

was journeyin' towards us. There were Irishmen, pushin' wheelbarrows; an' Mexicans with burros; an' German miners, an' French, an' English, an' Swedes, ploddin' through the mud across the Sierras with their tools upon their backs; there were organ-grinders an' Jew pedlars, an' women dressed as men, all comin' to Virginia City to claim the gold which I 'ad lost. I sat every day idly watchin' their approach, an' I hated them. I'd begun to believe in the Mormon's curse, an' to let things slide. There didn't seem to be much sense in stakin' out a new claim — if I made another fortune, I felt certain that I'd surely lose it all.

"Along wi' the adventurers an' prospectors came desperadoes, who intended to make their fortune at the gun's point, by shootin' straight! There was the Tombstone Terror, an' the Bad Man from Bodie, an' Sam Brown, the greatest bully o' them all. One night a half-witted feller asked him how many men he'd chopped. 'Ninety-nine,' says Sam, 'an' you're the hundredth.' He seizes him by the neck an' rips him to pieces wi' his bowie-knife. Then he lay down an' went to sleep on the billiard table, while the father gathered up what remained o' his son from the floor.

"An' there was El Dorado Johnny, who, whenever he was goin' to shoot a man, bought a new suit o' clothes an' had a shave, an' got his hair cut an' his boots polished so that, in case there was any mistake, he might make a handsome corpse. These were some o' the men that I lived among, an', like God, I said nothin' to any of 'em, but watched an' was interested in 'em all.

"I suppose I enjoyed myself, for I couldn't help laughin' quietly at their expense. 'What went ye out for to seek?' I would ask as, sittin' by the outskirts o'

the town, I saw this army o' men an' women struggle in from the mountain trail. An' then I'd answer myself, 'We have come that we may dig out gold, that others may take it from us. We have come to exchange our health an' hope for disease an' disappointment. We have come to gain all the world, which we shall not gain — an' to lose our own souls.'

"I tell you, it's mighty strange to think o' where all the gold, which those brave chaps o' the Old Virginia days dug out, has gone. Some o' it's been made into a necklace t' hang about a lady's throat; and some o' it's gone to Rome t' gild a cross; and some o' it's been made into a weddin' ring that a young girl might get married. I don't suppose the folk in the old lands ever think of how far the gold which they wear has travelled, nor how many have died in its gettin'. Some, which 'as bin made into a watch and goes to the city every day, may have come from King Solomon's mines in ships o' Tarshish; an' the king may have worn it hisself in his temple, or have given it away to the dark-skinned girl that he wrote that song about.

"When I thought o' these things in Old Virginia, it made me sort o' happy, so that I didn't mind what the Mormons 'ad said. Time seemed so endless, an' life so short, that I didn't seem called on to worry myself — only t' watch. If I found a new claim which panned out rich, I didn't work it myself; for I knew that, though I seemed lucky, I should end unlucky. An' I didn't tell anyone else about it; an' if they found it out for theirselves, I was angry. I'd found the Ophir, an' hadn't made anythin' out o' it — that was a big enough present for one man to make to his world.

"So I just looked on, an' saw the fools rushin' in who

expected to pile up fortunes. And I saw the camels comin' in an' out, carryin' salt to Virginia from the desert. They'd bin brought from Asia, an' I could see that they felt as I felt, an' despised the greed an' hurry o' what was goin' on. Later some of 'em got so disgusted that they escaped from their drivers — at that time they was bein' used in Arizona t' carry ore. I've often smiled when I've fancied the terror o' some lone prospector, should one o' them long-legged brutes poke up his nose above a ridge where gold had just been found, and sniff scornfully down on the feller. Some o' them camels may be still livin' an' doin' it at this very minute."

Beorn opened his jaws wide and laughed. Granger had never heard him laugh before, and the sound was not pleasant. There was nothing of mirth about the man or in anything that he said — there was only disappointment and scorn. His bitterness became horrible when he pretended to be merry. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." It was like the thunderous scoffing of the Lord God of the Hebrews.

The candle had gone out, and the eerie light of the northland dawn, drifting into the room through the little space of window that was uncovered, made him and his companion look old and comfortless. But he was anxious to hear the last of the story before the soul departed, so he said, "And how was it that you left the Comstock Mines and came into Keewatin?"

"I told you that I'd done what you intended, that I killed a man. I did more 'an that, I killed many. You see, at that time there was no proper minin' law in America; so when men got t'quarrellin', they soon

took t' fightin'. So long as the Comstock was only placer-minin', we knew what we were about, an' there was no trespassin'; but when we took t' tunnellin', it wasn't long before we was borin' under one another's ledges. The Comstock veins, startin' near the surface, dipped toward the west, an' therefore the first great conflict came with the nearest line o' claims t' the westward. The ledges here were very rich an' almost perpendicular, an' so the slopin' shafts o' the Ophir, Mexican, etc., soon ran int' the vertical shafts on the 'middle lead.'

"The earliest case t' be tried, which I remember, was that o' the Ophir against McCall. The court met in a stable, an' each side come armed. One witness was shot at several times as he was ridin' homeward, down a ravine at nightfall. Party spirit ran too high, an' the danger o' bringin' in a unanimous verdict was too great for any jury t' risk their lives by comin' to an agreement. There was no justice; so there was nothin' left but to fight it out, the same as when nations go to war. An' what were they goin' to fight about? A metal which was only val'able because o' its rarity — which had no value in itself, an' couldn't help men t' godliness; one which you couldn't make an engine out o', nor a plough, nor even a sword, because it was too soft. But in order to possess it, they was goin' to take each other's lives. I, an' every other man in that town, had thrown away or were throwin' away our souls for a thing which was truly worthless.

"One night as I slept, I heard a voice callin' to me an' sayin', 'I will make a man more precious than gold; even a man than the golden wedge o' Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, an' the earth shall remove

out o' her place, in th' wrath o' the Lord o' Hosts, an' in the day o' his fierce anger.' I heard that voice callin' to me not once, but several times; an' when I woke up, an' walked through the town, an' saw the men o' the Ophir preparin' to shoot down the men o' the McCall, I could still hear the voice repeating, 'Even a man than the golden wedge o' Ophir.'

"I went back to my shanty, an' found my Bible, an' read it many days, never stirrin' out. I remember there was one passage that seemed to accuse myself, an' to explain my own failure — 'If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, "Thou art my confidence"; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, an' because mine hand had gotten much; if I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walkin' in brightness, an' my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge, for I should have denied the God that is above.'

"I'd done all that. When I'd looked at the sun, I'd seen gold; when I'd looked at the moon, I'd thought of silver; an' when I'd found both the silver an' the gold in the Ophir, by Old Man Caldwell's Spring, my mouth had kissed my own hand — an' not God's. An' what I'd done, every one else was doin' in Virginia City; an' the Lord o' Hosts was angry, an' that was why men were killin' one another. So, when I'd sat still an' figured it all out, I said, 'God spoke to me because I'm the one man on the Comstock who, when he's found gold, tries to bury it; an' He spoke to me because He wants me to join with Him, an' help Him to shake the heavens.' So out I walked, day after day, an' watched things growin' from bad to worse; an' when

I'd seen all I wanted, I come home an' read my Bible — I knew that when God had need o' me He would send His messenger.

"One night a miner come to my cabin, an' he said, 'Are you ready to fight for the Fair-Haired Annie?'

"'I'm ready,' I said, 'but what's it all about?'

"'From a drift, a hundred feet down,' said he, 'that we're workin' on at present, we can hear the picks o' the Bloody Thunder drawin' nearer an' nearer; they'll break through to-morrer into one o' our ledges.'

"'What then?' I asked.

"'We're goin' to have a band o' men waitin' for 'em in the dark on our side o' the ledge, an' everyone o' those men is goin' to be armed. The moment that the picks o' the Bloody Thunder drive through an' the wall goes down, the men o' the Fair-Haired Annie are goin' to fire.'

"'All right,' I said. 'I'm wi' you. I'll be there.'

"So next day I, an' twenty other men, were lowered down the shaft; an' before we saw daylight again, the Fair-Haired Annie an' the Bloody Thunder had gone to war. That was the first o' the underground fights which took place on the Comstock. I picked my men, and paid 'em ten dollars a day, an' called my gang 'The Avengers o' the Lord.' No one 'cept myself knew what that meant, but they learnt t' fear us, for we fought to the death. Often when I was waitin' in the dark, listenin' to the sound o' the rival miners comin' nearer, I would repeat to myself the words, 'I will make a man more precious 'an gold; even a man than the golden wedge o' Ophir.' An' when a poor chap lay dyin', I would say to him those words."

"So you were sorry for the men you killed?"

"Oh, I was sorry, though that did small good to 'em. When the Lord's bent on destroyin', He don't take much account o' persons. When the first born o' Egypt were slain, He killed the evil wi' the good — served 'em all alike. But it's heart-breakin' work to be made an avenger o' the Lord."

"But I don't understand. What was there to avenge?"

"What was there to avenge? Why, the sinfulness o' those men, who was diggin' out the power an' temptation to sin from the place where God had hidden it. He meant that it should stay there forever; but now it'll be handed down from generation to generation, as is King Solomon's gold, temptin' our sons' sons to lose their souls as ours were lost."

"And when all the fighting was done, did the soldiers get after you?" asked Granger. But Beorn's eyes were closing, and the soul was departing as day returned. Already the sun was leaping above the horizon, and the sigh of the waking forest was heard. Granger seized him by the arm and shook him — he had learnt only the least part of that which he desired to know. "Was it for that crime that you fled, till you came at last to Keewatin for safety?" he shouted. "Quick, Beorn, tell me. Why did you go to the Forbidden River?"

The eyes did not open; but, as if the soul were answering him with a last warning as it passed out of the door of the body, the lips stirred, "Ay, man, it's terrible — the things men give for gold."

The face had become so ashy pale that Granger bent above it, painfully listening for the intake of the breath, to assure himself that Beorn was not dead. His clamour had aroused Eyelids; looking down towards him, he

saw that his eyes were wide and motionless, gazing towards the window with an expression of drunken terror.

"What's the matter?" he asked sharply.

The half-breed did not reply, but crouched and pointed with his hand.

Granger, turning his head and following the direction indicated, looked towards the triangle of uncovered window-pane, and there saw the face of a man, gazing hungrily in upon him — yet, not upon him, but upon the nugget which lay sparkling by Beorn's side upon the shelf. It was a face that seemed dimly familiar, but thinner and more haggard. At first it seemed to be his own face — the face of that *self* from which he had fled. Then he recognized, and knew that Spurling had returned.

CHAPTER XIV

SPURLING MAKES A REQUEST

THERE had been a time when Granger had desired to kill Spurling, and, though latterly he had not consciously wished that he were dead, yet he resented his reappearance; his presence broke in as a storm-influence on the stoical quiet which he had attained. This man stood for so many things which had been sinful and passionate in the past — things which it had cost him so much even to attempt to forget; things which he had promised himself that he would forget for Peggy's sake. And now, because he had chosen to return, it seemed necessary that he should call to mind the entire tragedy by asking the question, "When you shot that woman in the Klondike, did you know that she was not a man? And was she clothed in a woman's dress?"

Even though he kept silence, any hour Spurling himself might reopen the subject by inquiring after Strangeways, as to whether he had pursued farther, as to how he had fared, as to where he was at present. Granger was by no means certain that he did not already know that the corporal was dead. He shrank from the discomfort of playing the accuser again; he shrank still more from making the ugly confession that he himself was likely to be suspected of having committed a kindred crime, — a confession which would tend to degrade him to the level of this man whom he affected to despise.

So, from day to day, he postponed his questions and, in the meanwhile, watched Spurling narrowly.

His conduct had been very curious since that morning of his arrival, when he had announced himself by playing the spy, through the window of Bachelors' Hall, on the inhabitants of the Point. How long he had been there, and how much he had heard of what the Man with the Dead Soul had had to say, kneeling outside in the semi-darkness with his ear pressed against the pane, Granger had no means of discovering. But from the first it was clear to him that Spurling and Eyelids were possessed of a common knowledge, which made them enemies. Perhaps they had met before near the Forbidden River, and this had been the cause of Eyelids' delay.

Under ordinary circumstances, the mystery would soon have been swept aside by the putting of a single interrogation; but men on the Last Chance River get out of the habit of asking leading questions; in their parsimony over words, they prefer to watch and to wait — the reading of the minds of their fellows, and the secreting of their own motives, is almost their only pastime. So Granger watched and waited.

In Spurling, so soon as he had been fed and cared for, he was quick to discover a change. He had become manlier and braver — more like his old self. He carried himself with a kind of timid pride, as though he knew himself to be of a greater value than he was likely to be reckoned at by others; almost as though he were confident that he was possessed of a claim to merit which, once stated, could not fail to be recognised. At the same time, there was a distressful hesitancy in his manner, not unnatural under the circumstances,

of a man not sure of his acceptability. He seemed forever on the point of declaring himself, and forever thinking better of his decision — postponing his declaration to a later time. His bearing was an irritating combination of false humility and suppressed self-assertion.

Beorn, when he had recovered from his debauch, was as silent, absorbed, and uncompanionable as ever. He appeared to have retained no memory of what he had said, and to be quite unconscious of Spurling's arrival — he had become again in all things the Man with the Dead Soul.

But with Peggy and Eyelids it was different. Half-breeds as they were, and, by reason of their Indian blood, instinctive disguisers of emotion, their aversion for Spurling was plain. Sometimes, when his back was turned and they thought that they were unobserved, they would glance swiftly up at one another, and an expression would come into their eyes, a small pin-point of angry fire, which betokened danger for the man they hated. Very strangely to Granger, since Spurling's arrival, they had manifested a great fondness for being in his own company; one or other of them was never far from his side. Though he turned upon them angrily, telling them that he wished to be by himself, they continually disobeyed and, next minute, like faithful dogs, with apologetic faces, were to be found watching near by. What was the motive of their conduct? Did they think that he was in danger, and required protecting?

But there was a graver happening which he had noticed. With Spurling's return, he had thought that now certainly he had solved the mystery of the signalling

to the bend. On the first day, however, he had found himself mistaken. Sitting in the doorway of his store, he had watched the undesired one go down to the pier, push off in a canoe, and paddle down-river for a bathe. Quarter of a mile from the bend, he had seen him backwater, rise to his knees, gaze straight ahead in a startled manner, and then, turning quickly about, come racing back like one pursued for his life. Looking round, he had seen that Peggy and Eyelids were also witnessing these tactics, with expressions which betrayed their consternation. As he watched, they had raised their hands and waved. When Spurling had landed, he had been waiting for him at the pier-head. "What was it that you saw over there?" he asked sternly.

Spurling, being panic-stricken, had at first found difficulty in recovering his voice. Then, "Where? What do you mean?" he had panted.

Granger, in silence, had pointed northeasterly towards the bend.

With a nervous laugh, though his face was bloodless, Spurling had replied, "Nothing. I saw nothing. I just thought that it looked a bit lonesome, . . . so I turned back."

Gazing at him attentively, and seeing how he trembled, Granger knew that he had not answered truly. With a shrug of his shoulders, twisting round on his heel, he had said sneeringly, "On the Last Chance River we don't run away from loneliness as though the hangman were behind us. If we did, we should be running all the time."

He had not stayed to see the effect of his words, but long afterwards, when he looked down to the water's edge, Spurling was still sitting there, with his head between his hands and his body shaking.

Early one evening, some days later, he came to him and said, "Mr. Granger," and it sounded oddly from those lips — in the old days, even in the beginning of their acquaintance, they had never mistered one another, "Mr. Granger, is there anywhere we can go to be quiet? I have something very private which I want to say."

"O yes, there's the whole of Keewatin."

"But isn't there some place where we shan't be overheard?"

"We can paddle down to the bend. There's only one man who can hear us there — and he's in his grave."

"Not there. Not there," Spurling had cried, trembling with fear and excitement.

"Well, then, if you're so particular, you can speak with me here."

Spurling looked round to where, at a short distance, Eyelids was diligently idling above a broken net. "Somewhere where we can't be overheard," he reiterated. At that moment Eyelids turned his head.

This continual spying on all that he did, the reason for which he could not comprehend, was getting on Granger's nerves; he felt that it would be a relief to be alone, even though it meant being alone with the man whom he had most cause to hate. However, somehow he pitied him just now; perhaps because of the manner of his address, which had brought into sharp contrast their present relations with those of other days.

"There's the island up-river to the westward, where I keep my dogs in summer-time; if that will suit your purpose."

Spurling showed his pleasure at the suggestion, and, hurrying his steps, led the way down to the river-bank.

Getting into a canoe, they set out towards the west. They had not gone half a mile before they caught the sound of paddle-strokes behind them. Turning about, they saw that Eyelids was following. He attempted to loiter, and threw in a line as if his only intention were to fish. Granger flushed with anger. Without a word, he commenced to paddle back till they drew nearly level with the intruder, who pretended to be so engaged in his pastime as not to notice their approach. Then he cried in a voice that was choking with rage, "Get back to the Point, you half-breed spy. If you dare to follow me again, I'll turn you out to-morrow, and you can take your trade elsewhere." Nor would he proceed farther on his journey till he had watched his brother-in-law get safe to land; then, with a twist of the paddle, he brought his own craft round, and continued towards the sunset. Two miles up-river, in the middle-stream, stood a rocky island; as yet it was only a dull grey speck in a pathway of red.

They pushed on in silence up the straight, dark grove of mysterious forest. Water-birds were calling in the rushes; at one point, as they passed, a great bull caribou lifted up his head from drinking, and regarded them with a look of curiosity, totally void of fear; a heron drifted slowly over the tree-tops, and disappeared. To Granger, with even this short distance placed between himself and his customary associates, there came a sense of release, and with it an instinct for kindness. As they neared the shore of the island, the huskies commenced to howl; soon they could see them bunched together on the shore awaiting their arrival. A dog in the north, even though he has been imported, is never heard to bark. To hear them at first, a stranger might suppose

that a woman was wearily weeping herself to death in the forest, because of a grief which was inconsolable. The wail of the huskies, reaching him at intervals across the expanse of water, seemed the voice of his own desolation, coming out to meet him.

The whole world was empty, and he began to feel the need of friendship. He let his eyes linger on the head and shoulders of the man in front of him, and remembered with what eagerness long ago, when awaiting his arrival at some appointed rendezvous, he had striven to catch sight of him approaching, towering above the littler people of the London crowd. And now, instead of brief and chance-snatched moments, they were allowed to pass whole days together; yet, because of what had happened, they could find no pleasure in one another. Pleasure! The only sensation which he derived from Spurling's company was one of intense annoyance. And there had been a time when, if anyone had dared to tell him that that could ever happen, he would have denied it with an oath.

Could it be that the fault was his own, and that he had misjudged this man? He recalled how, when he had discovered Strangeways' body at the bend, and had thought it Spurling's, he had bitterly accused himself of all manner of unkindness. He smiled grimly at the remembrance — it was human nature to do that. He could quite well imagine that at some future time, when Spurling was truly dead, he might blame himself afresh, with an equal bitterness and an equal sincerity. It would be easy to judge charitably of him then, for he would be beyond power of working any further mischief to the living. It is fear, not cruelty, which lies at the root of all uncharitableness. If apprehension were

removed from our lives, it would be possible for the weakest man to live well. It was the fact that, trusting in God, he took no thought for the morrow, which enabled Jesus to become Christ.

Gliding round the island, they came to a sandy cove, which faced the sunset. There they landed. Lifting the canoe a dozen paces up the shore and placing it in the scrub, where it might be out of sight, they struck into the brushwood by a narrow trail, which at once commenced to climb. After three minutes of travelling, they came out on to a tall bare rock, to one side of which grew a solitary pine. From there they could command a view of the river on every side.

Granger settled himself down, with his back toward his companion, propping himself against the pine-trunk, with his face towards the fading light. The huskies gathered hungrily round in a semicircle, squatting on their haunches, wondering whether the coming of these men meant that they were going to be fed. The frogs croaked in the river; the mosquitoes trumpetted about their heads; save for these sounds, and the continual low murmur of the river, there was absolute quiet. In this environment, his eyes upon the faery domes and fiery spires of the western sky, into the inmost mystery of which the Last Chance River led, that torturing and old desire, which had always made it impossible for him to enjoy the moment in its flight, again possessed his mind: he had known it from a child, the ambition to follow, follow, follow, in the hope that somewhere, perhaps behind the setting sun, he might arrive at the land of perfectness for which he craved.

His thoughts were disturbed somewhat brutally by a voice behind. "Still careless of your life! I see you

hav'n't brought your gun with you. How did you know that it wasn't 'Die,' that I wanted to say?"

He turned lazily round, and was surprised at the altered expression which had come into Spurling's face. It was frank and self-reliant, and, oddly enough, had a look that was almost tender.

"What made you say that?" Granger inquired.

Spurling drew nearer. "Well, a fellow had to say something to break the ice," he replied; "so I thought I might as well give you your chance of taking the worst impression of me." He paused; then he asked in a low voice, "You were thinking of London and the old times?"

Granger nodded his head.

"I've often done that; I can understand. It was torture to me in the Yukon, and it was madness to me over there," pointing with his hand to the northward, where the Forbidden River lay. "What would you say," he added, "if I were to tell you that it could all come back again?"

Granger's reply was quiet and calculated, so that it seemed to be quite within the bounds of courteous conversation. "I think I should tell you that you lied," he said.

"But if I should give you proof that not only the old things were possible, but that El Dorado might come true, and that within a year we could seek it out together, as we have always planned to do?"

For answer Granger jerked out his foot, and sent a gaunt grey husky flying, which had come within his range. It was one of those which Spurling had left behind over two months ago at Murder Point, when he had exchanged teams with Granger in his endeavour to escape Strangeways. Spurling, when he saw it, recog-

nised the meaning which Granger's action implied. It was as if he had said, "So the old things are possible, are they, you villain? What about that man whom you say that you killed, whose body was washed up near Forty-Mile?" He opened his lips to explain, and then fell silent. It was impossible to excuse himself in the presence of those wolfish beasts, who had been witnesses to all the degradation of mind and body which had overtaken him in that terrible escape. No man could estimate the penalty which he had had to pay for his moment's folly, except one who had endured it. When he allowed his memory to dwell upon it, that frenzied rush across half a continent seemed to have occupied all his life. The thought of it made him afraid.

"Good God! And my mother meant me for a minister!" he exclaimed, burying his face in his hands.

Granger looked up suspiciously, but he said nothing.

"No, I never told you that," he continued fiercely, "and I suppose you don't believe me now. Seems somehow odd to you, I daresay, that Druce Spurling should ever have thought himself worthy to talk to men about their souls and Christ. You'd have thought it a good joke if I'd told you even when you knew me at my best. *When you knew me!* Bah! You never knew me; you were always a harsh judge when it came to setting a value on things which you didn't understand."

When Granger still kept silent and gave no sign of interest, Spurling broke out afresh: "Damnation! I tell you you never knew anything about me. You were always too selfish to take the trouble to get into other folks' insides; yet you went about complaining that people were unsympathetic. Here's the difference between us; I may be a scoundrel, but whatever I've

done I've played the man and never blamed anyone else for my crimes, while you —! You were always a weak dreamer, depending on others for your strength. You were discontented, but you never raised your littlest finger in an attempt to make men better. All you could think of was yourself, and your own ambition to escape. So though, perhaps, I've sunk to a lower level than you have ever touched, I want you to know there was once a time when I did reach up to a nobler and a better."

Gradually, as he had spoken, there had grown into his voice a concentrated fury. He was giving utterance to an old grievance over which he had brooded for many years; as happens frequently in such cases, only a portion of his complaint could be proved by facts, the remainder being an overgrowth of embittered imagination.

His eyes sought out the face of the man whom he accused, but it told him nothing; he sat there silent, with his head thrown back a little, unemotional as the distant stretch of cold grey river up which he gazed.

The sun had vanished, and the prolonged dusk of the northland was stealing from out the forest. At length Granger answered him: "It may be true, and if so, what follows?"

"Oh, nothing: only I thought I'd tell you this so that one man might not think too badly of me, if before long I should be called upon to die. I must have looked a horrid beast when I came to you last April."

Whether consciously or not, Granger nodded his head, as much as to say, "You did. Most certainly you did."

His companion broke into a harsh laugh. "The Reverend Druce Spurling! How d'you like the sound of

it? That's what I might have been to-day, and a fat lot you care about it."

To Granger, as he listened, there had come the painful knowledge, bearing out the accusation that he had never cared for the inward things of men, that this was the first scrap of confession which Spurling had ever let fall in his presence. Why, up to that moment he had not heard a word about his mother, and had certainly never credited him with a pronounced religious instinct.

Yes, perhaps that statement, which had sounded so exaggerated at first, was true; and he was a hard and selfish man. Up to now he'd excused himself on the score of his superior sensitiveness and ideality. Probably it was this same error which Père Antoine, in gentler manner, had tried to point out, when he said, "You will never help yourself, or the world, by merely being sad. No man ever has. It is because of your flight from sadness that you have met with all your dangers. All your life you have spent in striving to escape from things which are sad." His thoughts travelled back to those earlier days, when he'd poured out his troubles to Spurling, and told him all about himself; and always with the assurance that he would be understood and would gain sympathy. John Granger as he had been then, now seemed like a complaining child to himself. He was certain that, were he to be met by that old self to-day, he would have no patience with him. But Spurling had had patience.

So, when all was said and done, he must consider himself a pretty worthless fellow; and, after all, Spurling, despite his blood-stained hands, was probably the better man.

"Why Spurling failed to become a parson"—a

strange topic for thought and conversation this, on the Last Chance River at nightfall!

But Spurling was speaking again, timidly and half to himself. "Suppose God should brand a mark on our foreheads for every crime which we have perpetrated, I wonder what kind of beasts we should appear to one another then?"

Turning his head, in order that his face might not be seen, Granger replied, "Much the same kind of beasts, I suspect, as we appear to one another now." Then, speaking more hurriedly, "It wasn't to talk of these things, and to ask me that question, that you required me to come with you to some place where we might be by ourselves. Tell me, what is it that you want me to do for you? You were good to me once, and I'm willing to help you in any way that is honourable, and that isn't too dangerous."

Spurling laughed shortly, and said, "It isn't your help that I'm asking; it's you that I'm trying to help. Here, look at that." He passed something to him. "I didn't act squarely by you in the Klondike, and I want to make up for it now. When we made that strike in Drunkman's Shallows, the success of it turned my head; even then, if you'd not been so impatient, I think I should have come to myself and have behaved decently. You put my back up with your suspicions, and by seeming to claim a part of my wealth as though it were yours by right. But I'm anxious to forget that now."

In the meanwhile, Granger had been examining the thing which had been placed in his hands. It was wrapped up carefully in several rags, which were knotted and tedious to untie. When he had stript them off, he found that they contained a nugget, somewhat bigger

than the one which Eyelids had shown him, but of the same rounded formation, as though it had been taken from a river-bed. "Where did you get it?" he asked excitedly.

"Where the half-breed got his — from the Forbidden River. Does El Dorado seem more possible to you now?"

But Granger was thinking, and he did not answer the question. Suddenly the dream of his life had become recoverable. He had forgotten Peggy, and Murder Point, and even Spurling himself. Once more in imagination he was sailing up the Great Amana, following in his father's track. Once more he saw, as in Raleigh's day, the deer come down to the water's side, as if they were used to the keeper's call; and he watched anxiously ahead lest, in the rounding of the latest bend, the shining city should meet his sight and the salt expanse of Parima, from whose shores its towers are said to rise. In his eyes was the vision of the island near Puna, which Lopez wrote about, with its silver herb-gardens, and its flowers of gold, and its trees of gold and of silver; and in his ears was the tinkling music, which the sea-wind was wont to make as it swept through the metal forest, causing its branches to clang and its leaves to shake. He was far away from Keewatin now, making the phantom journey to the land of his desire.

"Does El Dorado seem more possible to you now?"

He turned to Spurling a face which had grown thin with earnestness, "Druce, tell me quickly," he said, "how long will it take us to get there?"

"To get to El Dorado? The answer to that you should know best. But to get to the place on the Forbidden River where this gold was found? Oh, about five days."

"Let us go there at once, then, before Beorn finds us out."

"Ah, Beorn! The old trapper who put that half-breed on my track!"

"Did he do that? Tell me about it."

CHAPTER XV

MANITOUS AND SHADES OF THE DEPARTED

"After I had left you, I journeyed three days to the northward, till I came to the mouth of the Forbidden River. There I found the cache which you spoke to me about; but I did not break into it at that time, as I was still well provided with food and ammunition. Because you had told me that the Forbidden River was unexplored and never visited, being haunted by Manitous and shades of the dead, I turned into it and travelled up it — I thought that I should find safety there.

"On the second day, just as evening was falling, I saw the flare of a camp-fire, about two miles ahead. You'll remember that my nerves were badly shaken when I came to you at Murder Point; and they hadn't been much improved by those five days of flight through the winter loneliness. When I saw that light blaze up in the distance, I began to be afraid — and it wasn't the fear of men that I was thinking about. I waited until it was utterly night and then, leaving my dogs behind, stole stealthily forward to prospect. As I drew nearer, I saw that a hut of boughs had been erected, and that a man was sitting, with his rifle on his knees, before the fire. He was very old and tall. But I had no opportunity to get a closer view of him, for, at that moment, he must have heard me; he put his head on

one side to listen, and rose to his feet. Without the waste of any time, he fired in my direction. Luckily I had thrown myself flat along the snow, for the bullet whizzed over my head. He advanced towards me a little way, and then, thinking that he had been mistaken, went back to his fire, grumbling to himself, and sat down. The cold ate into my bones, yet I dared not stir until I was certain that he had gone to sleep. Presently he arose, looked suspiciously around, piled more wood on his fire, and went into his hut.

"I hurried back to where I had left my dogs, harnessed them in and, leaving the river-bank, travelled into the bush for a distance of about two miles; there I tied them up, and then returned to the river by myself, coming out at a point somewhat nearer to the old man's hut. I lay down behind a clump of trees and waited. Before day had come, I could hear that he was astir; but he seemed to be almighty busy for a Keewatin trapper, who was only changing camp. About midday he had made his preparations, and, stamping out his fire, set out downstream, in the direction of the Last Chance River. I knew that in half-an-hour he must come across my trail, and have his suspicions of the previous night confirmed. Sure enough, after he had passed my place of hiding and had got below me about three hundred yards, he struck my tracks. He pulled up sharply, and wheeled round, as if he could feel that my eyes were watching him; he threw up his head like an old bull caribou scenting danger.

"I had left two trails leading from that point, the one towards his hut and back again, the other into the bush to where my dogs were tethered. If he was determined to follow up the latter and to trace me to my hid-

ing, I was ready for him, and would have the advantage of knowing his whereabouts, whilst he was ignorant of mine. He must have been going through some such argument himself, for presently he whipped up his dogs and, with one last glance across his shoulder, continued on his journey. When he had vanished, and I had made certain that he did not intend to return, I went forward to inspect his abandoned camp.

"Inside the hut I found that the floor was of earth and below the snow-level, making evident the fact that it had been erected before the winter had commenced. When I examined the walls, which were constructed of boughs and mud, I came to the conclusion that they had been standing for many years, but had been renewed from time to time. All this made it clear to me that you had been mistaken in saying that the Forbidden River had never been travelled. The next thing to discover was what had brought the old man up there. The earth of the floor was not packed together, but looked loose and rough, as though it had been newly dug. This gave me my first clue to the secret. When I walked above it, it did not sound solid, so I commenced to scrape away the earth. Six inches down I came to branches of trees spread crosswise, as though to form a roof to a cellar. Pulling these aside, after another hour of labour, I looked down into a pit which had been hollowed out. It was getting dark now, so I lit a fire.

"I climbed into the pit, by some rudely fashioned stairs which had been shaped in the side of the wall, and soon found myself on level footing. Groping about down there, I could feel that the sides were tunnelled, and had been roughly timbered with the stems of trees. Going above ground, I fetched a torch and then saw

all that I had commenced to suspect — and a good deal more.

"Piled up in one corner was an outfit of miner's implements, pans, axes, spades, picks, etc., and close beside them was a sack of moose-hide. Whipping out my knife, I cut through the thongs by which the sack was tied; it lurched over, letting fall a dozen ounces or so of gold dust. On searching round, I found in another corner a second sack containing nuggets. When I went about the walls, and pushed my way into some of the tunnels, I was made certain that I was in one of the richest placer-mines that I had ever set eyes on. Then I went up to consider what all this meant.

"Here was I, a man fleeing for his life, and here was this old man, a pioneer in an unexplored region, who, for some reason of his own, was keeping secret the knowledge of his bonanza, yet taking the gold out all the while. Couldn't I, by making the world a present of his knowledge, buy back my life? Soon I recognised that that was folly; the world would accept the present, but it would also demand my life. There was nothing for it but to act by stealth. If I could once get out of Keewatin with all these riches, I would be able to purchase my escape; especially if I should remain in hiding for a year or so, until the search had been abandoned, and I had been given up for dead. Then I could sneak out and get to South America, where I was not known, and commence life afresh. The thought of South America brought El Dorado to my mind, and then I remembered you, two hundred miles' distant at Murder Point. 'Why shouldn't I tell Granger?' I said. 'Then we could both escape, and go in search of El Dorado together, as we have always planned.'"

He paused and looked at his companion to see what effect his words had had. Granger was sitting with his head bent forward, his knees drawn up and his arms about them, all attention, with a strange look of hunger in his eyes. "Well, for God's sake don't keep me waiting, Druce. Go on," he said.

It was the second time that Granger had called him "Druce" in less than two hours; he was now certain of his ground.

"If you are willing to help me, I think we can do as we have always planned. What do you think about it?"

"I'm willing to the death. But after you'd discovered the mine, what did you do then? Did the old man come back?"

"The next few days I kept a careful lookout, in case I should be surprised. When nothing happened, I commenced to prospect for myself. I could not do much as the ground was frozen; but I thawed out some of the dirt, and gathered a few nuggets of pretty fair size. Then the river broke up, and I thought that I was safe for at least a time. But soon my provisions began to run low, so that it became necessary for me to turn back to the Last Chance River to break open the cache. I postponed the journey as long as I dared, and at last set out, with only enough flour and bacon to keep me going for two days. It was hard travelling, for my dogs were of no use to me, the snow being too moist for the passage of a sled. I had to work my way along by the river-bank, through melting drifts and tangled scrub. I dared not light a fire when I camped at night, lest it should be seen by the old man, and he should steal up and kill me while I slept.

"I thought I began to see why he had gone away so meekly, though he knew that a stranger had found him out and was likely to stumble on his treasure: so long as I was in hiding, I had had him at a disadvantage; but now, having gone away quietly without resistance, he was able to await me under cover at the Forbidden River's mouth, and I would be the one who would run most risk when we came to an encounter. He had known that sooner or later I should run short of grub, and be forced to return to the Last Chance, and to pass by his ambush; all that he had to do was to await me, for there is but one way out.

"If took me three days to make the journey and when, as night was falling, I came in sight of the spit of land which divides the two rivers, on which the cache had been made, I had exhausted my supply of rations. I was faint with hunger and perished with cold; but I dared do nothing to provide for myself until I had made certain that I was not spied upon.

"The river-mouth looked deserted enough; on either bank it was bare of trees — a bald and bleak expanse of withered scrub, affording little cover. It would be difficult for any man to approach me, without being seen before he had come within gun-range. I followed along the left-hand bank, which I had been travelling, till I reached the point where the Last Chance and Forbidden Rivers join. Gazing up and down the Last Chance, the same scene of desolation met my eyes; there was no flash of camp-fire or sign of rising smoke. In the north, from which quarter the wind was blowing, I could detect no smell of burning. I began to think that I was safe, and determined to make short work of breaking into the cache and getting back to the hut

again. Then I awoke to a fact which I had overlooked in my anxiety to avoid a surprise attack, that the cache was on the right-hand bank and that I was on the left.

"The river was flowing rapidly, carrying down tree-trunks and grinding blocks of ice, so that it seemed impassable. Every now and then the hurrying mass would jam and pile up, forming a pathway above the current, but not for so long a time as would allow me to climb across.

"I'd been going on half-rations for several days in order to make my food eke out and, consequently, was miserably nourished. A death by drowning is preferable any day to the slower tortures of starvation; I made up my mind to cross the river at once, at whatever cost. I began to forget my fear of the hidden enemy in my eagerness to satisfy my hunger.

"Retracing my steps, I walked up-stream, searching for a tree-trunk which would be of sufficient weight to carry me. I planned to launch out a quarter of a mile above the point which I wished to make on the other side, and to trust to the current, and what little steering I could manage, to get me across. I lost much time in my search, for the larger logs which had been driven ashore had got wedged, and required more than one man's strength to refloat them.

"When I found a trunk of sufficient size, the wind had dropped and a mist was settling down, which made it difficult for me to see anything that was not immeately before my eyes. A haunting sensation of insecurity began to pervade my mind. I hardly know how to describe it; it was not dread of a physical death, but fear lest my soul might get lost. Though I was now

about to imperil my life, for the preservation of which, during the last half year, I had made every effort of which a human being is capable, that seemed to me as nothing when compared with this new danger. If a man dies, he may live again; but if his soul is snatched from him, what is there left that can survive? This was the menace of which I was aware — a menace of spiritual death, to the cause of which I was drawing nearer through the mist. My whole desire now was to procure the provisions for which I had made the journey, and to escape.

"I got astride the trunk, steadying myself with a long birch-pole which I had cut, and pushed off. The water was icy cold, causing my legs to ache painfully, as if they were being torn from my body by heavy weights. Soon the log was caught in the central current and began to race. Like maddened horses, foaming at my side, before, and behind, the drift-ice rushed. In the misty greyness of the night, these floating ruins of the winter's silence assumed curious and terrifying shapes. Sometimes they appeared to be polar bears, having human hands and faces; sometimes they seemed to be huskies, with the eyes and ears of men; but more often they were creatures utterly corrupt, who, swimming beside me, acclaimed me as their equal and as one of themselves.

" I remembered the reason which you had stated why the Forbidden River is never travelled — and I knew the power of fear as never before. I could not see where I was going; no land was in sight. I could perceive nothing but mocking befouled faces, and they were on every side. With my steering pole I pushed continually towards the right, dreading every moment

that I would lose my balance, or would be swept out into the Last Chance far below the cache. These thoughts made me desperate, and I renewed the struggle with something that was more than physical strength; I knew that, should I die at that time, I would become one of those damned grey faces.

"The crossing could not have occupied more than a few minutes, but they seemed like ages. I felt as though, for so long as I could remember, I had been sitting astride a log, hurrying through a mist on a rushing river.

"Presently I heard the grating of ice against ice and the cannoning of logs, and I knew that I was nearing the other side. There was a sudden shock; the tree which I rode swung round, and I found myself scrambling wildly up the bank out of the reach of the hands which were thrust out after me. I rose to my feet and ran, tripping and falling continually as my snowshoes plunged deep in the melting crust. Each time I fell, it seemed to me that I had not tripped, but had been struck down from behind by the river-creatures which pursued me. Then the sound of the water grew more faint, the mist closed in upon me, and I sank exhausted. I had no idea of my position as regards the cache, nor would I have any means of finding out until morning should come and the fog should rise. But I knew that it would be fatal to sit still in my sodden clothes, on the drenching snow, without a fire, till daylight; so I got upon my feet and commenced to tread slowly about.

"Presently behind the mist I could hear something moving, which was following and keeping pace with me stride by stride. Its footsteps did not seem to be

those of a man, but more frequent and lighter. I was in that state of mind when suspense is the worst part of danger; I did not care particularly how much I had to suffer if only I might know completely what death and by whose hands I was to die. Drawing my revolver, I made a plunge forward in the direction from which the sound had come. I saw nothing; but, when I stopped and listened, I could hear the footsteps going round about me at just the same distance away. I determined to pursue them; at any rate such an occupation would keep me in motion and prevent me from perishing from cold and dampness. But it's difficult to hunt the thing by which you are hunted. Towards daybreak a slight breeze got up which, coming in little gusts, cleared alleys in the heavy atmosphere as it forced a passage. The footsteps had ceased by this time, but I could hear the creature's panting breath; for some reason it had ceased to follow. I waited until I heard the breeze coming and then made a rush in the direction from which the breathing came. There, straight before me, sitting on its haunches, I saw the shadow of what appeared to be a gigantic timber-wolf; the only part of it which I could discern plainly was its eyes, which, to my terrified imagination, blazed out dazzling and huge through the gloom like carriage lamps.

"And another thing I noticed, that it was sitting beside the cache for which I was searching. Then the breeze died down, the mist closed in again, and I could detect nothing of the creature's presence but the sound of its breath.

"With my revolver in my right hand and my knife in my left, I crept slowly forward. Just ahead of me

I could see something stirring, and I fired. There was a scramble of hurrying feet, and then silence.

"When I came to the cache, it was deserted. I should have delayed till daylight, but my hunger was so great that I could not wait. Breaking it open, I sat down to gorge myself on the first thing that came handy — some raw fish which had been buried there. Something moved behind me; before I had time to turn properly round, it had leapt on my back. I could not draw my revolver, there was no time; my only weapon was my knife. I saw the great face and eyes peering over my left shoulder and made a downward stab, gashing open a deep wound from the ear to the lower fangs. With a cry that was almost human, the beast jumped back and vanished.

"When day had come, I took as much of the provisions as I could carry, and made good my escape. I was surprised at the old man's absence, and fearful lest at any moment he might turn up. I did not cross the river at the mouth, but worked my way along the right-hand bank, intending to cross higher up and nearer the hut, where it was more narrow. At noon I made a halt and snatched a little sleep, for I had purposed to travel through the night. Some hours after darkness had fallen, I began to be haunted with the old sense that something was following. At first I heard no sound, for I was travelling over open ground. Presently I had to enter a thicket, and there I was made certain; for I could distinctly hear the snapping of branches, as if bent and forced aside by the passage of some forest animal. I pushed rapidly ahead, for it was not the safest place in which to be attacked. As I glanced across my shoulder and from side to side, I

continually caught glimpses of a thing which was grey.

"Sometimes I was certain that I saw a face peering out at me from above the brake; but whether it was that of the old man or of the timber-wolf, I could not tell — strangely enough, their faces seemed to me to be one and the same. When the day came, I felt that I was free again, and making camp I slept. The same thing happened next night, and the night after that, for it took me more than three days to make the homeward journey. But each night, as I moved farther away from the Forbidden River's mouth, the creature which followed had to traverse a longer and longer trail to come up with me, as I approached nearer to my destination.

"After I had crossed the river and reached the hut, he rarely came; and then only when the dusk had fallen early because of clouds or rain. Yet there were times, just before the dawn, when I fancied that I could see him watching me from the bank."

"But what has this got to do with the half-breed?" Granger broke in impatiently.

"That's what I'd like to know myself. But I don't know, so I'm simply giving you facts as they happened. The horror of that wolf's face, which I confused with my memory of the old man's, made a deep impression on me; I suppose that's why I've said so much about it.

"However mistaken you may have been about the Forbidden River never having been travelled, you were correct enough when you told me that it was haunted. . . . And it isn't pleasant to be living a five-days' journey from the nearest white man, in a place where the beasts look like lost souls and have the eyes of the damned."

Granger shrugged his shoulders, "And the half-breed?" he inquired.

"The half-breed turned up five weeks after my return from the cache. I'd been out cutting cord-wood and, when I came back, he was sitting at the door of the hut. How long he'd been there, I could not tell; I had been absent for perhaps two hours. I tried to find out how he'd come, but he pretended not to understand; so, as I know no Cree, our conversation wasn't very lengthy, At first, however, in spite of the danger of his discovering who I was and what I was doing there, I was pleased to see him, for I was getting moody and low-spirited with living by myself. I tried to be content with supposing that he was a trapper, who had strayed out of his district and had lighted on me by accident.

"We sat by the fire outside the hut and smoked together, smiling and exchanging signs every now and then, to show that we were friendly. But I watched him closely, and soon perceived that he was far more knowing than he was willing to admit; I began to believe that he had visited me with a purpose. I hadn't allowed him inside the hut for fear he should see the pit, which was uncovered, and should guess the secret or get suspicious; but I noticed that, whenever he thought that I was not watching, his eyes would slowly turn in that direction. I determined to put him to the test. Though it was as yet quite early, I built up the fire for the night and signed to him that I was sleepy. He nodded his head and went on smoking; so I lay down and feigned to close my eyes. I must have fallen asleep, for when I woke the blaze had died down to a mound of charcoal and glowing ash, with here and there a little spurt of flame. When I looked stealthily round,

I discovered that my companion was missing, but by listening I could hear a sound of moving within the hut. Just then I saw his figure coming out, so I lay down as though I had never wakened. He stood in the doorway smiling to himself, holding something which sparkled in his hand. Then he returned to the fire and sat down quite near to me, so that he could watch my face.

"I suppose I must have betrayed myself for, without any warning, he flung himself upon me, slipping a noose about my neck as I attempted to rise, which he drew tight, so that I was nearly strangled. Standing behind me, jerking at the noose, he commanded me to hold up my hands. I was too choked and dazed for struggle, so did as he bade me. When he had bound me hand and foot, and gagged me, he threw me inside the hut and, without a word of explanation, departed down-stream on his journey.

"I tried to burst the thongs, but they were too stout either to loosen or to break. I wormed my way out on to the river-bank and tried to chafe them against a rock, but only succeeded in bruising my flesh. The sun came out and shone down upon me till my thirst grew agonising. It seemed to me that at last I had run to the end of my tether. Then a thought occurred to me; wriggling toward the fire, I found that it still smouldered. By pushing and scraping with my bound hands and feet, I managed to get some leaves and twigs together, which soon sprang into a blaze. I waited until it had died down into a narrow flame, over which I held my hands till the thongs were charred; then, with a quick twist of the wrists, which caused my scorched flesh to flake off in shreds, I wrenched my hands apart.

This is all true that I am telling you; you can see for yourself. Already you must have noticed those marks." He held out his wrists for Granger's inspection; they were horribly mutilated.

"And after that, when you got better, did the half-breed leave you undisturbed or did he come back?"

"I did not see either the half-breed or the old man again until that early morning when I gazed in through the window at Murder Point . . . and, do you know, that scar on the old man's face is in the same place as the wound which I gave the timber-wolf?"

Granger laughed nervously. "And what d'you make of that?"

"I hardly dare to say; but, somehow, that beast seemed to me to be more than a wolf — it looked like a dead soul."

"A dead what? You've said that once before to-night."

Spurling stared at him, amazed at his agitation. "A dead soul," he repeated; "a soul which has gone out from a man, and left his body still alive."

"Do you know what name the Indians have given to that old man?" asked Granger in an awe-struck voice.

"How should I know? I think you called him Beorn."

"Yes, but his other name is the *Man with the Dead Soul.*"

CHAPTER XVI

IN HIDING ON HUSKIES' ISLAND

THEY stared at one another in silence, striving not to realise the meaning of those words; yet their meaning was unavoidable.

Both knew the legend of the *loup-garou*, the grim tradition of the peasants of Quebec which the *coureurs des bois* have carried with them into every part of Canada. Often in the Klondike, when seated round the stove on a winter's night, they had heard it retold by French-Canadians, in low excited whispers, with swift and frightened turnings of the head. They had laughed at it in the daylight: yet at night, when the tale was in the telling, it had seemed very real to them. Then there had come that Christmas-Eve, when Jacques La France had been found dead in his shack, with a hole in his neck, just outside of Dawson City. Little Baptiste had owned with tears to the crime, and had excused himself saying that he had been compelled to the shooting because Jacques was his dearest friend, and Jacques had become a *loup-garou* through not attending the Easter Sacrament for seven years; as everybody knew, only by the inflicting of a bloody wound on his beast's body could his soul be saved from hell.

The jury who had tried him had been composed mostly of French-Canadians. When it had been proved to them that wolf tracks had been found before

the dead man's threshold, they had acquitted Baptiste, and had apologised for his arrest, in defiance of the judge's disapproval.

Two and a half years at Murder Point had made Granger undogmatic on problems of metempsychosis, and of the extent to which the barriers which hedge in Man's spiritual life may be pushed back.

It seemed not unlikely to him that there were men whose souls, consciously or unconsciously, either by reason of their crimes or for the better accomplishment of an evil desire, could go out from their bodies while they slept, and be changed into the forms of beasts of prey between sunset and dawn-rise. At all events, this was a phenomenon which could not be disproved, and there were many who believed it true.

So he recalled unjudgingly the story of Jacques, also he remembered an instance still nearer home — that of the Hudson Bay factor, who had prayed to God that he might gaze with his living eyes upon his disembodied soul.

It was not the possibility of the fact which he doubted, but Spurling's motive in telling him such a tale.

Might he not have shown him the gold only in order to regain his friendship, and then have lied to him in order to restrain him from investigating, and, perhaps, with the purpose of sowing distrust in his mind concerning Beorn and Eyelids? Whatever had been his purpose, *there* was the gold; Granger was determined, in spite of the risk, to see the Forbidden River for himself. Spurling was speaking, "And his eyebrows meet," he said.

Granger knew to what he was referring, for, all the

world over, where this belief is current, it is supposed that the werewolf may be detected in his human guise by the meeting of his eyebrows, which appear like wings, as if his soul were prepared for flight.

He was about to reply, when his hand, straying about his throat, chanced upon the silver chain by which the locket of Mordaunt was suspended, which he had stolen from the body of Strangeways. It was like a warning voice, recalling the past, which urged him to distrust this man. Spurling must have seen the change, for he leant over towards him appealingly, as if he were about to entreat him to be patient. With a gesture of annoyance Granger rose to his feet and commenced to walk away; but he halted sharply and drew into the shadow, signing to Spurling to keep quiet. From very far away, borne on the stillness of the night, they could hear the rhythmic beat of several paddle-blades.

Crawling upon his hands and knees, Spurling joined him. "What is it?" he asked. "Is it Eyelids again?" Granger pointed up-river. "They're coming from the west," he whispered, "and there are at least four men by the sound of the blades."

"What men come from the west at this season? Surely, they should be travelling in the opposite direction, going towards God's Voice?"

"They should be, and it is for that reason that I fear for your safety."

Nothing more was said, but Spurling guessed what was implied — that this might be a fresh messenger of justice, coming down the Last Chance River to rob him of his life.

Very stealthily, taking advantage of every shadow, they crept down the hillside through the underbrush,

till they came to the cove where they had landed. Twenty paces from the water's edge they hid themselves, at a point from which they could command a view of the travellers' approach.

Nearer and nearer the monotonous swirling of the water, beaten by the paddles, came; the darkness ahead of the island shifted and took shape; they could distinctly hear the sound of men's voices, engaged in low-pitched and angry conversation. A large canoe, carrying six men, which flew the red flag of the Hudson Bay Company, shot out from the shadows. Now they could make out some of the words which were being spoken by two of the travellers.

"And you say that you believe he's innocent! Well then I tell you that he's a damned scoundrel. If he didn't actually kill him, it wasn't for lack of the desire; you may bet your sweet life on that. In any case, he's a demoralising influence in the district, and it's best for all parties that he should be put out of the way."

A second voice interrupted at this point; it seemed to be arguing and trying to conciliate, but its tones were so low and spoken so rapidly that it was only possible to gather its general intention. The first voice spoke again.

"I don't care about the other man; there's no sense in looking for him. He's probably dead by now. But the fellows I can't stand are these blamed private traders; they're always up to some dirty work. When I get my chance of putting one of them out of business, I don't hesitate. To hell with all private traders, I say."

The canoe had now drawn level with the cove, so that Granger was able to recognise its occupants. In the stern sat the Indian steersman, with a rifle ready to his

hand. Next to him sat a large red-bearded man, broad in the shoulders, massive in the jowl, almost brutal in his evidence of strength; even in that dusky light one could feel that his face was clenched in a scowl, and that his eyes were piercingly gray and cruel. Facing him, with his back towards the prow, sat Père Antoine, a little bent forward, gesticulating with his hands, his whole attitude that of one who is trying to explain and persuade. After him came the remaining three Indian and half-breed paddle-men, sharp-featured and unemotional, stooping vigorously to their work.

"And what do you propose doing?" asked Père Antoine.

"Why, what I've already told you a dozen times — treat him like a mad dog. I shall arrest him at once, and take him back with me as prisoner to God's Voice. When once I've got him there, I shall make him confess and get together sufficient evidence to have him hanged. This whole affair has been a scandal, and I'm going to put a stop to it. I shall make an example of this man. Why, soon it won't be safe to travel anywhere, unless you go protected. He must have had a nice lot of ruffians for his friends, if this fellow Spurling was a specimen. And now they've taken to paying him visits. . . ."

The canoe bore the speaker out of earshot, leaving the listeners with the sentence uncompleted.

Granger was aroused from some very uncomfortable imaginings by Spurling, who, touching him on the elbow, exclaimed in surprise, "Why, it isn't me; it's you they're after!"

Then, when he received no answer, he asked, "What is it that you have done?"

It was Cain accusing Judas with a vengeance.

"Done! I've done nothing," Granger exclaimed, pushing him aside; "Robert Pilgrim is mistaken."

"That's what we all say, until we are forced to own up."

But Granger was not listening to what Spurling said; he was tortured with the truth of one sentence which he had heard that night. "If he didn't actually kill him, it wasn't for lack of the desire." How had Robert Pilgrim guessed that? As he himself had confessed to Strangeways, he had been tempted at first to let him go on his way unwarned, and take his chances of falling through the ice. Eventually he had cautioned him, but so late and in such a manner that his words had only had the effect of skilfully forwarding his earlier base intention. *If he had not actually killed him, it was not for lack of the desire.* And by how much was he superior to this man, crouching at his side, whom he had so often condemned and had again condemned that night?

Spurling answered that question for him. Rising to his feet and stretching his cramped arms and legs, he remarked, "Well, of course, if you won't take me into your confidence, there's nothing more to be said. If you don't want to tell me, I won't trouble you by asking again; but it seems to me that we're both in the one boat now."

This new sense of equality with his companion, though it was only an equality in crime, had suddenly brought about a change for the better in Spurling. He carried himself freely, in the old defiant manner, and had lost his attitude of cringing subservience. At first Granger had it in his heart to hate him for the change, knowing,

as he did, that it arose from an unhesitating acceptance of this chance-heard, unproved assertion of his own kindred degradation. But soon the hatred gave way to another emotion, which, perhaps, had its genesis in a memory of those earlier days, when this man had been willing to stand between him and the world. In gazing upon him, looking so big and powerful, he was comforted with a sense that his misery was shared. A latter-day writer has wisely recorded, "I have observed that the mere knowing that other people have been tried as we have been tried is a consolation to us, and that we are relieved by the assurance that our sufferings are not special and peculiar. In the worst of maladies, the healing effect which is produced by the visit of a friend who can simply say, 'I have endured all that,' is most marked."

And it was this consolation which Granger now began to experience in Spurling's presence.

Though the separate circumstances which lay behind their common accusation were utterly different, the one man being innocent of the infamy wherewith he was charged and the other guilty, their danger was the same.

Without telling him anything of Strangeways' death or entering into any explanation of the reasons for which he was suspected, Granger determined to face, without dispute, the premier fact in the case — that he was hunted for his life as was Spurling — and to plan for the future with him, as though he were his fellow-criminal in result as well as in intent.

They returned to their former station, on the rock beneath the solitary pine, from which they could command a view of the approach to the island on every side,

and there lay themselves down, so that their presence might not be observed. Then Granger spoke, "Well, and what is to be done?" he said.

Spurling's answer was brief and to the point. "Hide here till the way is clear; then seek out the Forbidden River, and afterwards escape."

"But Eyelids knows where we are, and he may betray us?"

"Yes, but he does not know, unless you have told him, that I am a man with a price upon his head; and it is me, not you, whom he hates."

"And we have no food."

"If the worst comes to the worst, we have the huskies; and it seems to me that the priest was your friend — and then there is your wife."

Even in his present predicament Granger could not restrain a smile, for it had not occurred to him to rely on Peggy for help — *his wife*.

"Yes," he replied grimly, "there is my wife."

But before the night was over he had occasion to regret his sneer. They had agreed to keep watch, turn and turn about, two hours at a stretch. Spurling was on guard, when Granger was aroused by the furious yelping of the huskies on the shore which was nearest to the river-bank.

Peering cautiously over the edge of the rock, they could see that something was swimming down the current, making for the island, but whether man or animal they could not yet discern. As it came nearer they saw that it was a head, upon which was balanced a burden, which the swimmer supported with one hand. Running down to where the huskies were gathered, they cuffed them into silence, and there waited. The laboured breathing

grew louder and louder; presently a face was lifted clear of the water, which Granger recognised. Turning to Spurling, as he stepped into the river to help the swimmer out, he whispered, "It's Peggy."

He caught her in his arms, and, taking her bundle from her, drew her safe to land. She was naked and shivered in the cold night air — a slender statue of bronze. Her hair hung dripping about her shoulders, and her eyes were bright with excitement. Granger thought, as he gazed on her, that he had never realised how beautiful she was. Freed from her conventional European garments, there was a grace of rebellion about her which brought her into harmony with the forest environment, which was also unconfined.

But she had come to the island on a serious errand, and with no thought of being admired. Drawing her husband to one side, she told him that he would find a revolver and food, sufficient for three days, in the bundle which she had brought, and advised him to lie quietly on the island until Robert Pilgrim should have gone away. She told him that Père Antoine was his friend, and was doing his best to save him. When Granger asked her how she had known where he was, she replied that Eyelids had told her, but that she had made him promise to tell no one else, so that even Antoine was in ignorance of his whereabouts. She had given them to understand that he had set out for God's Voice a week ago, and had simulated surprise and grave concern that he had not arrived before the factor's departure; but she added, "They know that I am lying."

When Granger referred to the murder with which he was charged, and began hurriedly to explain why he had not told her about it, she became strangely per-

turbed, and cut him short, saying that she must get back to the store before her absence was observed. It was quite evident to him that she had not for a moment doubted but that he was guilty; it was also evident that so small a misdemeanour as killing a man was not reckoned in her code of morals as being very blameworthy. He felt hurt at her lack of faith in his integrity; but afterwards, when he came to think things over, was amazed at her unswerving loyalty in spite of that deficiency.

He watched her plunge into the river on her return journey, swim across, run lightly up the bank to where her clothes were lying, and disappear in the gloom of the forest.

"If I could only learn to care for her," he thought, "even here, in Keewatin, I might have something left to live for." And then, in the solemnity which precedes the sunrise, made conscious of the emptiness which her departure had left, he added, "And I do begin to care."

It was noticeable that in all that she had said, she had made no reference to Spurling. For the next three days they lay in hiding, no one coming near them, either friend or enemy. To occupy the time, and forget their anxiety, as though they were not men who dwelt beneath the shadow of death, they talked of their old quest, making plans for the future, and mapping out with their fingers in the dust new routes, by the following of which El Dorado might be attained. And it was thus that they strove to escape the pain of the realness of their present — by entering into a faery land, sufficiently remote from life to remain unthreatened.

It was in this land of the imagination that they had first met, and formed their friendship. Revisiting it

in one another's company, the hideousness of what had happened was, for the time being, blotted out; they renewed their former intimacy and passion. With the mention of familiar names, kind associations of bygone pleasures were aroused, and the old affection sprang to life. They shrank from any allusion to such things as had befallen them since their London days. Yet continually, in the midst of the most eager conversation, one or other of them would glance up, and cast his eyes along the river to the eastward, remembering Murder Point. It was in the early dawn of the fourth day, when, gazing toward the store, Granger descried two red squares of sail flapping against the sunrise. It was his lookout, and Spurling was asleep. He aroused him, bending over him and crying, "The York boats are coming from Crooked Creek; we shall be rid of Robert Pilgrim now." When Spurling was thoroughly awake and had seen the sails for himself, he asked him to explain. Then Granger told him how, in the summer of every year, the outposts of the Hudson Bay Company send in their winter's catch of furs to the head fort of their district, which in this case was God's Voice, where the skins are baled and graded, and dispatched to the London headquarters — which, being the most important duty of a factor's year, meant that Robert Pilgrim would have to return in order to superintend.

All through the long June day they waited, hoping to see their enemy's departure; but the sails had been lowered and nothing was now visible of the York boats save their tall bare masts jutting above the river-banks. At times they would see groups of voyageurs, walking distantly among the trees, perhaps assisting the factor in one last lazy search for the fugitive. As the heat of

the afternoon increased, even these disappeared. But, when evening was come, they saw, to their great joy, that the sails were hoisted again; and presently, borne to them over the brooding stillness, they heard the cries of the rowers and the thud of the heavy oars in the wooden rowlocks. Those sounds meant freedom to them; they trembled in their excitement.

Peering out from between the bushes, they watched the approach of the two black galleys, each with its eight oarsmen and cargo of piled-up bales, like pirate craft returning with their spoils. The flashing of the gawdy scarves of the men, the motion of their bodies as they stood up for the stroke, flung their weight upon the enormous oars, and sat down at the finish, only to rise up again with monotonous shouts of encouragement, the banging of the sail against the mast, the rippling of the water as the prow pressed forward — all these spoke of life to the watchers, of endeavour, and bravery, and travel, causing their blood to redouble its pace and their hope to arise. There was still one doubt which troubled them, lest, in spite of the need of his presence at the fort, the enmity of Robert Pilgrim should have persuaded him to stay. But that was soon laid to rest, when in the bows of the leading York boat they saw his canoe, and later, as the sail swung round, caught a glimpse of the red-bearded man himself, seated in the stern. Antoine was by his side. As the boat passed by, they strained their ears to catch any scrap of conversation which might be of use to them in making their escape. But the noise of the voyageurs and of the wind in the sail was deafening, moreover the boat was making good headway, so that they only overheard one phrase:

"You've brought me on a fool's errand. You say the man is dead, and you've shown me his grave, and yet. . . ." It was Pilgrim who was speaking; but before he had finished his sentence, his voice was drowned in the shouting of the men and the splashing of the blades.

Granger, having watched them out of sight, turned to Spurling with a sigh of relief. "Thank God, they've gone," he said.

Then he noticed that his companion was deadly pale. "What's the matter now," he asked; "are you so badly cut up at parting with such dear friends?"

"Did you hear what he said?" gasped Spurling, pushing his face nearer, and staring Granger squarely between the eyes. "Did you hear what he said? 'You say the man is dead, and you've shown me his grave, and yet. . . .' And yet what? Can you guess how that sentence was going to end?"

Granger was bewildered by his ferocious earnestness. He could not imagine its purpose, or what had caused it. "Why, of course I heard what he said," he replied. "I suppose Antoine's been trying to persuade the factor that I am dead, and he's loath to believe it."

"If that is what he meant all the better for us, but I doubt it."

But why he doubted it Granger could not get him to confess; so, turning his mind to other thoughts, like a sensible man, he set about launching the canoe, preparatory to the return to Murder Point. The last sight they saw as they paddled away, was the four gray huskies, which Spurling had brought with him on his first arrival, seated on their haunches in a row by the water's edge, raising their dismal voices to the sky. "Looks as though

those damned beasts were doing their best to call Pilgrim back," said Spurling.

On the way to the Point they talked matters over, and determined that, since they had no time to waste, they would stop at the store only so long as was necessary for the getting together of an outfit, and would depart for the Forbidden River that night. Eyelids and Beorn were to be left in charge at Murder Point, which would serve to flatter at least one of them, and would keep them occupied. If they should demand an explanation for this sudden going away, the answer was obvious, that Granger did not choose to be arrested by the factor of God's Voice. There was only one embarrassment which stood in their way, which was that in Granger's absence the boat would probably arrive from Garnier, Parwin and Wrath, bringing articles of trade in exchange for his year's collection of furs, letters of instructions from the partners for the future conduct of their interests, and expecting to carry back to Winnipeg his annual statement of accounts. He made up his mind to meet this difficulty by ordering Peggy to tell the partners that he was dead. Such a report, he calculated, were it believed and properly circulated, would help him greatly in his escape from Keewatin, when he had gathered his gold on the Forbidden River and was ready to go out. This course of action had been suggested to him by the unfinished sentence of Robert Pilgrim, which they had overheard.

As they drew near the Point, they were struck with the profoundness of its quiet. They themselves had experienced so great a change in their four days of absence, so much of emotional strife and perturbation, that they were somehow surprised to find it unaltered.

Beorn, as usual, was sitting on the pier-head, smoking his pipe; he did not look up or recognise them. Eyelids, on the other side of the river, was setting his evening nets: he nodded to Granger from across the water, smiled and went on with his work. On entering the shack, they discovered Peggy busily engaged over the evening meal, as though they had forwarned her as to when they would arrive. Her face betrayed neither annoyance nor pleasure — she might never have visited Huskies' Island. In the presence of so much that was commonplace, Spurling's fantastic account of what had happened to him on the Forbidden River seemed absurd and outrageous.

It took them two hours to prepare their outfit and carry it down to the canoe; they were in no hurry to set out, for so long as they were on the Last Chance they intended to travel only by night.

No one seemed to notice their doings, and even they themselves, becoming infected with the quiet of their surroundings, gradually ceased from conversing, and, except for an occasional necessary question, did their work in silence. At last, when it had grown as dark as it ever is in June time in Keewatin, signalling to one another with their eyes, they agreed that it was time to set out. Spurling having stepped down to the pier, Granger looked round for Peggy. He found her sitting in the grass a few paces behind him; she had come there so gently that he had been unaware of her nearness. Taking his place beside her, he commenced to speak to her the words which he had planned to say. She listened attentively, making no sign which would betray her state of mind. "Do you understand?" he asked her; and she for answer bowed her head.

Thinking that she was indifferent as to what became of him, he rose to his feet, saying in a hard voice, "Good-bye. I must be going. Thank you for what you did for me on the island!" He had turned his back and descended the mound a few paces, when he felt her clinging to his hand, pressing it against her cheek, and he knew that she was crying.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked, bending down to her.

"Don't go, don't go," she whispered.

"Why not, Peggy? I've not been of much use to you. I don't think you'll miss me."

"I hate that man," she panted.

"But why?"

"Because he's taking you away from me; and, though you may return from this journey, there will come a day when you will not return and I shall be left alone."

Granger was surprised at her display of passion — she had seemed to him so cold. He had come to think of her as only a squaw-wife: but it was the white woman in her who had spoken those words. He tried to comfort her, denying her doubts and talking to her as though she had been a frightened child. But throughout all that he said she kept on whispering, "He is taking you away from me. One day he will see to it that you do not return."

And had Granger stopped to think, he would have known that what she said was true; for, when once his dream of El Dorado had become capable of accomplishment, she would be to him as nothing. He heard Spurling calling him by name. Lifting her to her feet, he kissed her upon the mouth, and, amazed at his own kindness, as though he had done something shameful,

ran down the mound, stepped into the canoe, and launched out.

Bending forward to Spurling, who was sitting in the bows, "It's El Dorado or death this time," he whispered. Spurling did not answer him, but he saw him crouch his shoulders as if to avoid a lash, and heard his mutter, like the echo of his own voice, "*Or death.*"

The canoe was travelling heavily, for Spurling had stopped paddling. Granger was about to expostulate with him when, watching him more attentively, he discovered that his eyes were fixed upon the bend. As they drew nearer, and were passing by, his body trembled and he buried his face in his hands. Not until the bend was behind him did he take up his paddle — and then he flung himself into the work with frenzy, as one who fled.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FORBIDDEN RIVER

"If we are to get back before the winter closes in upon us we must start to-night."

Spurling looked up from the pan of dirt which he was washing. "You've said that ten times a day in the last two weeks if you've said it once," he snapped.

"Yes, but I mean it this time. We've got all the gold that we can carry. If you won't come with me, I shall take the canoe and start back by myself."

"Oh, you will, will you? And d'you think that I don't see through your game?" Then noticing how Granger's hand had gone instinctively to his hip-pocket, he added, "And if it comes to fighting, I go armed myself."

In a flash both men had whipped out their revolvers, but Spurling was the fraction of a second late; Granger had him covered.

"So you're going to murder me, after all," Spurling continued sneeringly. "You've postponed it a long time; it was at Drunkman's Shallows that you were going to do it first. Your excuse then was that you weren't John Granger, but your baser self. You were always a good hand at excuses. And pray who are you now?"

"Throw away that revolver," shouted Granger, in a voice that was thick with anger.

Spurling tossed it a couple of yards away.

"No, that won't do. Throw it into the river. Don't rise to your feet; crawl to it on your hands and knees."

Spurling looked at him surlily to see whether he dared disobey, then did as he was commanded. There was a flash of silver as the weapon spun through the air, a commotion of spray, as though a fish had risen, and a distant and more distant shining as it sank down and settled on the river-bed.

"That's right. Now let me tell you, Druce Spurling, that you're a fool for your pains. If either you or I are to be alive this time next year, however we may feel towards one another at present, we've got to act as though we were friends. There'll be time enough for quarrelling when we've seen the last of Murder Point, and have passed out over the winter trail with our gold, and know that we are safe. Why, you fool, we've been here nearly four months and we've already got more gold than we can take with us; it's October, and the river may close up almost any day."

Spurling began to mutter something about how, if it weren't for Granger, *he'd* be able to get out all right.

"What's that you're saying?" Granger interrupted him. "I've heard that tale ever since we set out and I'm sick of hearing it. You fancy that the Mounted Police think that you are dead, and have ceased to search for you, and that I'm the man they're after now. You say that I'm known in the district, and that you are unknown, except by that half-breed who caught sight of you as you went by God's Voice; therefore you argue that I am a danger, a hindrance to you. You'd like to get rid of me, so that you may get out with the gold, in safety, by yourself. It's the same old trick that you

tried to play me in the Klondike; you want to reach El Dorado without me. You swine! Do you know why it is that the Mounted Police are after me? It's because I took pity on you, remembering old times, and tried to prevent your being hanged — that's why. And you make it an excuse for deserting me. I've not told you that before, and I can see that you don't believe me now. Well, I'm not going to give you the details which would prove it — I'm not asking for gratitude from such a cur as you've turned out. All I'm going to say is this: from the first of your coming up here I've tried to play fair by you; I've done more than that, I've come near giving you my life — giving, mind you, not letting you take it as you've been inclined to do many times. And I'm willing to play fair until the end — until we get outside and are safe; then we can each go on our separate ways, if we so decide. I know where I'm going — to El Dorado. I daresay you're going to try to get there too, but that is none of my concern. I'm concerned with the present. That canoe is mine, and what's left of the grub is mine. The gold we share between us. If you don't want to come with me I'll take the canoe and other things which belong to me, and my share of the dust and nuggets, and you can stay here. But if you come with me, you've got to be honourable and behave like a man — not a husky. I give you two minutes to make your choice."

"There isn't any choice to be made," growled Spurling; "you offer me your company or starvation. I choose your company, much as I detest it. And I'd like to know who you are to speak to me like this? And what there is to lose your temper about? If you'd explained what you'd wanted, I'd have come quietly; but I'd

rather cut my throat at once and be done with it than be ordered about by a man like you — a fellow married to a squaw-wife."

Granger's face went white and his lips trembled; his finger closed upon the trigger, then with an effort he controlled himself. "I think I've heard enough from you on that point," he said; "suppose we drop this discussion and get the canoe ready?"

He turned upon his heel and walked into the hut, followed more slowly by Spurling.

This was by no means their first falling out in the past four months; from the night that they left Murder Point things had been going from bad to worse. Given two men who set out into the forest together, bound by the strongest ties of friendship, who travel in one another's footsteps and sleep side by side for days and nights at a stretch, without seeing any other face but one another's and their own reflected visage, with nothing to break the silence but their own voices, and the cries of the wilderness, which have become irritatingly monotonous because of their sameness and frequent reiteration, and it is a thing to be marvelled at if they do not come back enemies. But when they set out each with his own hidden secret, each with his own private suspicion of his companion, with a gnawing enmity between them which has been changed into a show of friendship only by force of circumstance, when the object of their journey is a possession over which they have quarrelled before and parted company, concerning which they are already secretly jealous, then the final relationship of those two men can be forecast without any fear of error.

Before they had reached the Forbidden River they had ceased to converse. By the time that they had landed

at the hut, their nerves were jangled. Before they had been working there many days they had thought their way over all their old grievances, and, like petulant children, were on the lookout for any new cause of offence. The cause had come when Spurling, tired with rocking the cradle, his face and hands swollen by the sun and mosquito-bitten, had said, "I don't see why we should take all this trouble. I'm going to quit work."

Granger was attending to the flume which they had constructed. "You're going to do no such thing," he had said.

"Yes, I am; you're not my master and I shan't ask your permission. There's as much gold as we shall require in those two sacks which the Man with the Dead Soul washed out. If you've got such a scrupulous conscience, you can dig out your share; but I'm not going to help you."

"So you've turned thief now, in addition to your other profession," was the retort which Granger had thrown back.

Out of such small foolishnesses had arisen quarrel after quarrel, so that it had become only necessary for Spurling to make a statement for Granger to contradict him, or for Granger to express a desire for Spurling to thwart its accomplishment. Day by day they would toil together, digging out the muck, emptying it into the sluice-boxes or testing it in the pan, without exchanging a word; then some trifling difficulty would arise, for which, perhaps, neither of them was responsible, and they would seize the opportunity to goad one another on to murder with the evil of what they said. On one point only were they agreed — the gathering of the most wealth in the shortest time; for wealth meant to them

escape and the preserving of their lives. To this end they feverishly laboured both day and night, reserving no special hours for sleep and rest. Yet, even in their escape, as has been seen, they did not necessarily include one another; so far as Spurling was concerned, when once the gold had been acquired, it was "each man for himself." There was no loyalty between them; they were kept together only by a common avarice, and by fear of the wideness of the Northland.

Yet there were times when Granger would waken to a sense of something that was better. By the end of August they had washed out all the dust and nuggets that they could possibly carry, and it was then that he had recognised that greed, regardless of consequence, had become the master-passion of both their lives. The words which the Dead Soul had spoken to him would come back, "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir" — and he would look at Spurling and, bending down above the water, he would regard himself. Going over to Spurling he would say, laying his hand upon his shoulder, "Druce, in spite of the harsh things which we have spoken, we must still be friends, and seek out El Dorado together."

After such a reconciliation they would talk together of their plans and the various ways in which they would amend their lives; but gradually they came to know that, while they lived, their hatred never could be dead, and, defiant of whatsoever resolutions they might make, would surely reassert itself. It was the spirit of the North which spoke through them, and not they themselves — the spirit of silence, striving to utter itself, and of enmity to all the world.

They carried out their treasure from the hut and placed it in the canoe. It was done up in all kinds of packets, in flour-sacks, empty tobacco-tins, torn strips of blanket which they had sewn together, and abandoned clothing tied up at the arms and legs. Before they had placed it all in, together with what remained to them of their outfit, the little craft sat so low in the water that it was evident that it would be swamped if there was added to its burden the weight of two men. They were compelled to sit down and consider how much of their outfit could be abandoned. Even then, when they had rejected all the provisions, save those which were necessary for a five days' journey, and their blankets and their rifles, the canoe was still unsafe.

At Spurling's suggestion they limited themselves to half rations and took off all their clothing except their trousers and shirts; and still it was too heavy. Very reluctantly they set to work to take out some of the gold, commencing with the smaller amounts. When they had finished, they had thrown out all their last month's work, and still the canoe was by no means steady.

Spurling, with the foresight and thrift of a man who has a long life before him, went into the hut and, bringing out a spade, commenced to dig. When he had made a hole of sufficient width and depth, he buried the abandoned nuggets and gold dust.

Granger watched him to the end. Then, with a touch of bitterness in his tones, he asked, "And what's that for?"

"In case I should ever be able to come back," said Spurling, "and so that no one else may find it."

"Don't you worry yourself, you'll be in El Dorado

before that time, or else hanged. In either case, a trifle like that won't matter."

He scowled; Granger's flippancies on the subject of death, especially death with a rope about his neck, always made him feel unhappy. He tried to take his place in the stern, but Granger would not trust him there; he signed to him to take the forward paddle, where he would have no opportunity of making a surprise attack. They pushed off and quickly lost sight of the hut, the discovery of which had meant so much to them. Now that they had procured their wealth and abandoned their diggings, all their eagerness was for escape.

The sunset lay behind them, and before, like a black-mailed host, preparing to dispute their passage, the shadows of night were gathered. During the past month the forest leaves had turned from green, and gray, into copper, yellow, and flaming red. The branches of the tallest of the underbrush were already bare and, clustered together beneath the tree-trunks, created the effect of scarves of mist which shifted from silver to lavender. The floor of the forest was of gold, where the fallen foliage had scattered; but, where the scrub-oak grew, it was golden splashed with blood. The dominant tone of the landscape was of gold and blood; through the heart of which ran the river, changing by infinitesimal, overlapping shadings from yellow into red, from red into night-colour, from night-colour into nothingness. Down this roadway passed the trespassers, with the thing which they had stolen weighing down their canoe to the point of danger; murder was in their hearts, and grey fear ran before them. Instinctively they bowed their heads, suspicious of one another, peering ahead into the dis-

tance for an enemy who awaited them, and from side to side or behind for one who followed.

During their stay at the hut, nothing had come near to disturb them — nothing in human guise. But from the first they had been aware of the timber-wolf, which Spurling had seen on his first visit and had described to Granger. It had not shown itself in the daytime and had rarely been seen in its entirety at night; but they had known that it was near them by the rustling of the bushes, and had at times caught a glimpse of its shadow, or of its eyes looking out at them from under cover.

Even when they had not heard it, they had come across its footprints. Towards the dawn, had one of them risen early and strayed far from camp, he had sometimes seen it cross his path ahead, or had heard it tracking him. So nervous had they become, that they had never stirred far from one another; while one had slept, the other had kept watch. Perhaps this dread of a constant menacer, and the more terrible fear of being left alone in its presence, had prevented bloodshed when their more furious quarrels were at their height. Of a mere wolf, no man who is armed need have terror; their discomfort arose from the suspicion that this creature, which watched and lay in wait for them, was more than an animal.

There had been a night when it was Spurling's turn to keep guard, and he had slept. Granger had wakened with a nervous sense of peril. Through the open door of the hut he had seen the silver of the moonlight in the tree-tops across the river and had seen the outline of his companion stretched along the ground. As he watched, he had seen a shadow fall across the threshold,

followed by a head. It was grey in colour, the ears were laid back, and the fangs were bared as if with hunger. But it was the eyes which had absorbed his attention. They were angry and reproachful; he had seen them before — they were the eyes of a man whose soul is dead. They recalled to him that night when Beorn had declared himself. That he recognised them, as he admitted to himself when daylight was come, may have been only fancy; but the impression which he had while he gazed on them was very real. Moreover, he saw distinctly the scar of the wound which Spurling had inflicted in his fight at the cache. Then the head had been withdrawn, and the hut had been darkened by a huge form which stood across the doorway. He had heard Spurling turn over on his side, rouse up and cry out.

The form had crouched and sprung, and the light shone in again. There was a sound of scuffling outside, followed by a thud. Leaping to his feet, dazed and bewildered, he had run out in time to see a timber-wolf of monstrous size, with Spurling's arm in its mouth, dragging him away into the forest. Careless of his own safety, he had gone after the animal, belabouring its head with the stock of his rifle, for he was afraid to shoot, lest he should wound his companion. It had dropped its prey and fled, bounding off into the dusk between the tree-trunks, leaving Spurling a little mauled but not much injured. This experience had served to prove to them that, however much they hated, they were still indispensable to each other's safety, and must hold together.

Granger, for his own peace of mind, had sought to find an explanation for this happening. If the beast was

indeed Beorn's soul, then why was it exiled there, on the Forbidden River? Had Beorn killed the miners, in his underground fights on the Comstock, not out of righteous indignation, as he had stated, but only for the pleasure of destroying life and out of envious, disappointed avarice? Had he mocked God consciously in making Him responsible for those crimes, and in attributing to Him their inspiration? If these things were so, then this might have been his fitting punishment, that, when by his own wickedness he had made himself an outcast from the company of mankind, and had been compelled to banish himself, for the sake of his own preservation, to a land where nothing was of much value, money least of all, there he had discovered the gold in the profitless search of which he had made himself vile. The power over gladness, which it would have represented to another man, had been of no use to him now, for he had not dared to take it out of the district to where it would acquire its artificial worth; yet he had not dared to remain on the Forbidden River: for there was no food there. So his body and soul had parted company; his body going south to God's Voice, while his soul stayed near to the thing after which it had lusted, for which it had exchanged its happiness, to guard it, that it might not become the possession of a freer man and bring him the gladness which to a murderer is denied.

This had seemed to Granger to be the only explanation which fitted in with all the facts. In accepting it, he had found room for the suspicion that he also had laid waste his life not for the sake of romance, not for his dream's sake, but for the sake of greed alone. Having made gold his hope, having said to the fine gold, "Thou

art my confidence," he had committed an iniquity to be punished by the judge.

Had he suffered all that punishment as yet, or was there worse to follow? Would the worst that he could expect be death? Once, when he was poor, he had only feared life; but now, with his treasure beneath his feet, with the canoe gliding southward on the journey out, there was added this new terror — the fear of death. He desired most passionately to live now.

Darkness had fallen and the air was growing colder. Presently, flake by flake, the first snow of winter drifted down. The two men said nothing, but they paddled faster, for the chill struck into their chests through their shirts, making them repent the folly which had led them to abandon their clothing that more gold might be carried. Every now and again, Spurling broke out into a fit of coughing and, as he shivered, the canoe trembled. As for Granger his hands were heavy, his arms ached, and his fingers were numb; he dimly wondered at his own perseverance that he still continued to ply his paddle. As the cold spread through him, his senses took to sleeping. He was aroused by a sudden jerk and a shout from Spurling, "Curse you. Back water. Turn her head out into the river."

Looking up, he saw that they had struck the bank and come near capsizing. And he saw more than that; scarcely two yards away a pair of glowing eyes shone out at him.

"For the sake of God, make haste," cried Spurling; "the brute's about to pounce."

With a twist of the paddle he swung the canoe's head round, and with the help of Spurling drove her out. They were none too early, for, just behind them,

where a moment since the canoe had been hanging, they heard a splash.

For the rest of the night they kept watch over themselves lest they slept. Till the dawn broke, whenever they turned their eyes toward the bank, they could discern the grey streak of the timber-wolf, dodging in and out between the tree-trunks, keeping pace with them. So long as they were on the Forbidden River they journeyed both day and night, allowing themselves scant time for rest. If they had been eager to get there, they were still more anxious to get away. When in the middle of the third night they swung out into the Last Chance, they stopped and looked back. The moon was shining; sitting squarely on its haunches they could see the timber-wolf, which had run out on the spit of land to the water's edge, gazing after them malignantly.

Breaking the long silence, Spurling said, "Thank God, he can come no further."

"But his body awaits us at Murder Point," Granger replied.

"I can deal with men's bodies," Spurling said. Then they moved onward, pressing up against the current.

At the first hint of daylight they landed and hid themselves, lest, in that deserted land, their presence should be detected. The precaution proved wise, for about noon a party of belated voyageurs passed northward en route for the Crooked Creek. They were singing, keeping time with their paddles; their careless gladness made the hunted men, for all their gold, feel envious.

They dared not kindle a fire, and at last, that they might save the little warmth they had, were compelled to lie down together, breast to breast, clasping one another closely as though they were friends. At sun-

set they again set out. All night long to Granger the sky seemed filled with uncouth legendary animals, which trooped across the horizon file on file. Sometimes they were Beorn's camels, sometimes they were timber-wolves or brindled huskies with yellow faces, but more often they were creatures of evil passions, for which there are no names. To avoid looking at them, he would keep his eyes in the canoe or would stare at Spurling's back. But the sight of his companion's monotonous movements, compelling him to go on working when his arms ached and his body seemed broken, caused such mad fury to arise within him that he feared for his own actions, and was glad to return his eyes to the clouds. At dawn, as though a golden door had been opened, the creatures passed in and disappeared, and he saw them no more till sunset.

For himself, he would gladly have lain down, and died, had not Spurling with the same indomitable courage which he had displayed on the Dawson trail, roused him up and compelled him with his brutal jibes to play the man. By the end of the first day on the Last Chance their food gave out, and since leaving the hut all their meals had been scanty; then they would willingly have given a third of the gold which they carried in exchange for a hatful of the flour which, in their greed for nuggets, they had left behind on the Forbidden River's banks. If a bird flew over their heads, they dared not fire a gun lest its report should be heard, so great was their fear of possible arrest.

As their weakness increased, the downward rush of the current seemed to gather strength; there were times when their progress was almost imperceptible. Sufficient snow had already fallen to cloak the land in white-

ness, and they were very conscious that every day the temperature was sinking lower. In the middle of the seventh night of their journey they felt something grate against their prow, and they knew that the river was freezing over. They had only five more miles to traverse; they were too exhausted and stiff with cold to attempt to reach their destination by walking along the bank, even if they had been willing to abandon their treasure; so there was nothing for it but to make one last effort. So nerveless were they with fatigue that, when they went by the bend, Spurling forgot to be afraid of the thing which he had seen there; he had not the strength to remember. They reached the pier when the dawn was breaking, so faint that they could not rise and crawl out. They would have drifted back over the way which they had travelled, had not the ice closed in and held them.

Two hours after their arrival, Eyelids looked out from the window at Murder Point and, seeing them, came to their rescue and lifted them into the shack.

They had arrived none too early, for that day the river froze over, the snow fell in earnest, and the Keewatin winter settled down.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BETRAYAL

GRANGER had been sick and delirious for several days as a result of exposure and starvation. Day and night Peggy had nursed him with unwearying attention; one would have supposed that he had been always kind to her, and that she was greatly in his debt. Since his brain had cleared she had said little to him; but, when she touched him, he could feel the thrill of passion that travelled through her hands. Her face told him nothing; it was only when suddenly she raised up her eyes that he saw the longing which they could not hide. Because her eyes betrayed her, she rarely looked at him. He would gladly have spoken with her frankly, but her reserve deterred him, and, moreover, a great anxiety weighed upon his mind — he did not know how many of his secrets and hidden intentions he had let out in his ravings. The altered bearing of his companions made him aware that they had each learnt something fresh about himself, one another, and the manner in which he regarded them. The Man with the Dead Soul was alone unchanged.

So he sat among them on his couch of furs as morosely as Beorn himself, striving to grope his way back into the darkness from which his mind had issued, torturing himself to remember how much his lips had admitted during the time when his vigilance was relaxed. He

could only recall the shadows of his words and acts; the real things, which lurked behind the shadows, continually evaded capture. Yet it seemed to him that he must have laid bare all his life, confessing to Eyelids and his sister his every affection and his every treachery, whether accomplished or intended.

Then, if he had done that, he had told Peggy to her face how he was purposing to desert her! It was this suspicion which kept him silent; he waited for her to reveal herself. But she refused to help him; in her looks there was no condemnation, and in her treatment of him nothing but gentleness. Surely there should have been contempt, if she had known *all* about him!

Two pictures stood out so sharply from the background chaos of his impressions, that he believed them to be veritable memories. The one was of Peggy kneeling at his side, taking him in her arms, as though he were a child, and laying his head upon her breast, and of himself mistaking her for his mother or Mordaunt, and speaking to her all manner of tenderness. The other was of his perpetual terror lest Spurling had gone southward without him, having stolen his share of the treasure; and of one night when Peggy to quiet him had roused up Eyelids, who had brought in Spurling — and Spurling's hands were bound.

When he had come to himself, his first action had been to look round for Spurling — and he was not there. Two days had now passed, and there was still no sign of him. As his strength returned, the fear of his delirium gained ground upon him — lest Spurling had escaped. Brooding over the past with a sick man's fancy, he discovered a new cause for agitation — *if Spurling had departed, he would never know the truth about Mordaunt.*

For the recovery of the gold he scarcely cared now; the apparent actualness of Mordaunt's presence, bending over him in his delirium, had recalled her vividly to his memory, awakening the passion which he had striven to crush down, so that now it seemed all-important to him that he should ask Spurling that one question, "Was the body that was found near Forty-Mile clothed in a woman's dress?"

The return of a certain season, which the mind has associated with a special experience, will often arouse and poignantly concentrate an old emotion, which has been almost forgotten throughout the other months of the year. The arrival of Spurling, and the agony which he had suffered when he had begun to suspect that the woman whom he loved was dead, had happened when the snow was on the ground; perhaps it was the sight of the frozen river and the white landscape which now caused him to remember so furiously the vengeance which he had planned, should Mordaunt prove to be the woman whom Spurling had murdered. So, for the time being, the seeking of El Dorado and preserving of his own life seemed paltry objects when compared with the asking of that question, and the exacting, if need be, of the necessary revenge.

On the third day after the recovery of his senses he could endure his suspicions no longer. Peggy had gone out for a little while; Eyelids was busy in the store; only the Man with the Dead Soul was left with him in the shack. Seizing his opportunity, he got up and dressed. He was so weak that at first he could scarcely stand. Tottering toward the door, he already had his hand upon the latch when Beorn arose and followed him. Though Granger had asked him no question, "I will show you," he said.

Outside they met Peggy returning; but her father waved her sternly aside, and, putting his arms about Granger to support him, guided him to the back of Bachelors' Hall. A stoutly built cabin was there, which stood by itself and was windowless, the door of which was iron-bound and padlocked; it was used as a cell in which Indians and half-breeds were kept, should they grow refractory. Producing the key, he opened the door; as they entered they were greeted with a volley of curses.

In the farthest corner lay a man, crouched on a bed of mouldy furs. The cell was not often used, and was covered with decaying fungus-growth from the dampness of the past summer. When Granger tried to speak to him, his voice was drowned by the sort of noise that a dog makes when it comes out from its kennel; then he saw that Spurling was chained low down to the floor by his hands and feet, so that he could not stand upright. With an hysteric cry of gladness he ran forward, and was only saved from Spurling's teeth, as he bent back his head, by Beorn, who pushed him to one side so heavily that he fell to the ground. Then Eyelids came in, and picked him up and carried him back to the shack.

For the next few days he had plenty of leisure to reflect. He wondered whether Beorn's treatment of Spurling, and the fact that he had shown him to him on the earliest occasion, was meant as a threat to himself; or had the disclosures which he had made in his delirium given him the impression that he also was entirely Spurling's enemy. The bearing of Eyelids and of Peggy led him to believe that the latter supposition was correct. His natural instinct was to free

the man at once, — but he thought better of it; Spurling would be at least kept out of mischief there till he himself was well.

Now that his mind was at ease, he commenced to mend rapidly; when two more days had passed, he was up and able to get about without much help. On visiting the trading-store he found that his canoe was lying there, just as he had brought it back; nothing of its contents had been removed or unpacked. He sat down beside it, and tried to formulate his plans.

So far, in spite of his illness, everything had happened for the best. Spurling was safe until he should require him. The gold was now in his absolute possession. Very shortly Eyelids and Beorn would set out on their winter's hunt, leaving him, save for Peggy, free to act unobserved. But he had made a discovery, the knowledge of which disturbed him — that a part, at least, of the reason for Peggy's reticence and new gentleness was that before long she would be a mother. That fact made him feel differently towards her; he could not now desert her, for it would mean abandoning his child.

When he pictured to himself what the Northland might do for a child who was fatherless, especially if it were a girl, he knew that, whatever plans he made, they must include his half-breed wife. Moreover, her approaching maternity appealed to the chivalry in his nature, making him ashamed that he had ever thought to leave her. Until his child was born, at whatever risk to himself, he must postpone his departure and lie in hiding at Murder Point. And after that? He must take her into his confidence, as he should have done long ago, as if she were all white.

He would have to leave her behind at first, but would make arrangements for her to follow after him when the road was clear.

Having arrived at this point, his train of reasoning was broken off by the appearance of Eyelids, who came to ask for two outfits, and to inform him that he and Beorn had determined to set out on the winter trail that night. The rest of the day was spent in preparations, and the getting together of their teams of huskies.

Just before they left, a visit was paid to Spurling in the cabin, and the key was handed over to Granger. While there, Granger referred to the matter which he had been wanting to mention all day. Turning to Eyelids, as though it were of little importance, he said, "Before you return, as I daresay you've noticed, something will have happened. I want you to promise me to come back for Christmas Eve, so that we may celebrate the event." Then, throwing aside his disguise of indifference, he spoke more earnestly, "I want you and Beorn to promise me that."

Spurling looked sharply up from his corner; being ignorant of the matter which Granger hinted at, he watched to see if the words contained a reference to himself. Peggy turned her head away and began to steal softly out. But her brother stayed her, and throwing his arm about her shoulder, said, "I promise you; we shall return." And Beorn gave him his hand as a sign of his assent.

They closed and locked the door on the prisoner, and the father and son set out.

A sudden instinct for carefulness had prompted him to make that request. At the last moment he had thought that he noticed on Beorn's part a certain

uneasiness in handing over to him the custody of Spurling. He was afraid that the distrust might grow upon him, causing him to return unexpectedly, perhaps just at the time when he and Spurling were starting on their southward journey. It was to prevent such an interference with his plans that he had named a definite time for their next meeting, for, by so doing, he had given Beorn to understand that he intended to remain at Murder Point throughout December. The hinting at the birth of his child had added to his request a show of naturalness, and had at the same time let them know that he was aware of his wife's condition — a difficult knowledge to communicate to people who spoke rarely, and then only of trivial affairs. As yet he had not decided as to when he would set out, for he hesitated between the manfully fulfilling of his new responsibility and the callously accomplishing of his old purpose; if he should choose the latter, he had provided for Peggy so that she would not be left too long by herself, by the promise which he had exacted from her brother and father to return for Christmas Eve.

For the first time he was left truly alone with her. Standing side by side, they watched the trappers descend the Point to the pier, where their dogs lay waiting them. The whips cracked and the teams straightened out.

For a few strides they moved toward the opposite bank and then, to Granger's amazement, wheeled to the left, and commenced travelling up-river to the west. The loaded sleds swung lightly over the ice and, as he listened, the shouting of the drivers and the yelping of the huskies grew fainter, till they were no more heard. He was made terribly afraid by the direction they had

taken, for he knew that Beorn's trapping grounds had always lain to the northwards, and never around God's Voice; they were still less likely to do so now, since he had quarrelled with the factor. Then why had he gone to the west?

He turned to the girl at his side to question her. "Did you know that they were going there?" he said. She did not answer him; he saw that her eyes were intently fixed upon the bend. Her lips moved, and her hands made the sign of the cross upon her breast as if she were praying. Without replying, she entered the shack.

He did not follow her, for his feelings were changed with anger. He felt that, whether knowingly or unknowingly, they had betrayed him through their secretiveness. While he had been absent they must have heard that Spurling was a man with a price upon his head. They might even have learnt it from Pilgrim at the time of his June visit, but had not laid hands upon him because he had appeared to be his friend. But now since their return, in his delirium he had probably uttered words concerning Spurling which had left them with the impression that he desired his death — and had given them their excuse for gratifying their own covetousness and revenge for the Forbidden River trespass.

Even what he had said to them about returning for Christmas Eve might have been taken as having a double meaning, referring not only to the birth of the child, but also to the thousand-dollar reward to be gained by the arrest. Spoken as it was, in the prison-cabin, that was most likely how it had been taken. Since they had accepted him as their confederate, it

seemed evident that they did not know that the arrest of Spurling might entail his own hanging. If all that he had conjectured was true, he had now no option but to release Spurling and to make good his escape with him at once; for from Murder Point to God's Voice was no more than seventy miles. At once! But he would not be strong enough to travel for some days yet, and Spurling could not be in very excellent condition for such a journey — to be thrown into an out-house and left there for a fortnight, with back bent double and arms and legs bound, is not the best kind of training.

Before doing anything rash he would talk to Peggy, and find out how much she knew about it. Following her into the shack, he made fast the door and threw himself on the pile of furs which had been his couch. The lamp was not lighted, but the stove was red-hot and scattered an angry glare. He called to her; she came to him timidly from the far end of the room and sat down beside him. He commenced abruptly by telling her that the man who was chained out there in the cabin was a murderer. Did she know that? She nodded. How did she know that? She shuddered, and pointed with her hand out of the window in the direction of the bend.

He did not gather what she meant, but for the present he let it pass.

And did she know that there were a thousand dollars offered for Spurling's capture? She shrugged her shoulders, and again gave her assent. Then, raising himself on his elbow, he asked her plainly, "Is that what Eyelids has gone to get?"

She smiled down at him as though she were owning to something worthy; "I hope so," she said.

"Why do you hope so," he asked in a hard voice; "because of the money?"

She drew back from him as though he had affronted her. "No, not for that," she said, speaking slowly.

"Then why?"

"Because he is trying to take you away from me."

"And you think that when the Mounted Police have hanged him that it will be all right, and I shall stay here?"

She did not answer him, but he knew that she was thinking of her child. "Whether Spurling escapes or is taken," he said, "will make no difference to my doings. I cannot stay; they are hunting for me, because they think I also am a murderer."

She turned sharply round. "But we are doing this to save you; we thought that you agreed and understood. When you have given them this man, they will pardon you, and you will be allowed to stay."

"Who told you that? Was it Antoine?"

"Robert Pilgrim."

He laughed in her face. "Bah! Robert Pilgrim!" he exclaimed. "He told you that, and you believed him! Why, you little fool, he doesn't care a curse what happens to Spurling, whether he's caught or gets away; it's me that he's anxious to put to death. But he couldn't have told you that when we were in hiding on Huskies' Island, or you'd have betrayed us then."

"He sent word to us by a messenger while you were away. But, if I had known, I shouldn't have betrayed you then, for this man seemed to be at that time your friend."

"Then why have you done so now?"

"Because he has become your enemy and you hate

him; and because there is no other way of saving you for my child and for myself. He is trying to take you away from me." She spoke in a fierce strained whisper, kneeling, with her hands spread out before her, and her head thrown back.

"You haven't saved me," he said, rising to his feet angrily; "all you've done is to place the rope about my neck."

CHAPTER XIX

THE HAND IN THE DOORWAY

He picked up a lantern and, having lighted it, left the shack. Going round the out-building of the store, he made his way through the snow to the cabin where Spurling was imprisoned. As he placed the key in the padlock, he could hear the rattle of the chains of the man inside. Having opened the door, he halted on the threshold, afraid and ashamed to enter. There was dead silence. Lifting the lantern above his head, he could make out the figure of Spurling, crouched like a beast on knees and hands, with eyes which watched him doubtfully.

"They have gone," he said.

Spurling did not answer, but followed his every movement.

"They have gone," he repeated; "but they have not gone to the Forbidden River — they have gone in the direction of God's Voice."

Then Spurling spoke. "Thank God," he said, "for they'll hang you as well."

Granger placed the lantern on the floor and sat himself down. "Spurling," he said, "we both of us have some old scores to pay off; at the present moment, I happen to have the upper hand. But this is not the time to settle them. For instance, you have never told me the name of the woman whom you shot in the Klondike."

Spurling broke in furiously, saying, "I have told you

already, that it was not a woman I murdered, but a man."

Granger waved him aside with his hand. "I'm not asking you her name," he said. "We've not got the time to quarrel, for there is still a chance of our saving ourselves. It'll take Beorn and Eyelids at least four days to reach God's Voice and come back. But I don't think they'll touch at God's Voice at all; they'll skirt it and go farther south. They won't trust Robert Pilgrim, lest he should claim a part of the reward. If I know Eyelids, it's the thousand dollars he's after, and he wants it all for himself. Their purpose is to go on until they meet the winter patrol, so that they may be able to give direct information to the Mounted Police themselves. Now before they do that, a good deal of time may be lost, for the winter patrol has hardly started as yet, and it may go in a new direction so that they'll miss it at first. With the best of luck, they'll have to travel three hundred miles, a ten days' journey, before they fall in with it. While they're searching for it, we shall be able to slip by them and get out. If you'll promise to stand by me I'll release you. If you won't, I shall leave you here and go on myself. But I warn you fairly, no man, unless he leaves the gold behind him, can make that journey by himself with any hope of surviving. Our last chance, whether we want to reach El Dorado or merely to save our lives, is to stick together and persuade ourselves that we are friends."

"I'll stand by you," Spurling said; "I'm no more anxious to die by the rope or starvation than you are yourself. But what are we to do with the half-breed woman — your wife? To leave her behind us, free to go where she chooses, would be suicide."

Granger eyed him angrily, for he did not like the sinister whisper in which he had asked that question. He might just as well have said, "Shall I shoot her while you go outside and scrape out her grave?" But to have paid attention to it just then would have brought them to high words at the outset; so he said, "We can't take her with us, for she is soon to have a child. But I think, when I have explained things to her, she'll give us her promise to keep our secret, and we shall be able to trust her word."

"Humph! You think that? Well, knock off these chains."

Granger brought the lantern nearer and was stooping to his work, when Spurling stopped him, laying his hand upon his shoulder. "Hist! What's that?" he said. Granger listened. He could distinctly hear the crunch of footsteps on the snow, moving stealthily away from the cabin. Running to the door, he caught sight of a woman's skirt, disappearing round the corner of the store, and recognised the shadow which was flung behind as Peggy's. She must have heard all that they had said.

Spurling waited till his chains were off and he was able to stand upright, a free man. Then he asked significantly, "And now what are you going to do with her?"

"That is my business," Granger retorted hotly.

"But I think that it is also mine."

He knew that it would be unwise to argue the point, so he led the way to Bachelors' Hall, Spurling limping stiffly behind. So cramped had he become with the cold, and the position in which he had been chained during his confinement, that he could hardly move a

step without groaning. Until he should recover, despite his own weakness, Granger knew that he was physically the stronger and still had the upper hand. For Peggy's sake he intended to make the best use of his time; he began to have fears for her as to what might happen were she left to the mercy of Spurling's choice.

"What are we coming here for?" growled Spurling, as they stopped at the door of the hall; "why can't we go to the shack? I'm desperately cold and there's a fire there."

"I'll light you a fire," said Granger, placing his hands on his shoulders and thrusting him inside.

"You're mighty anxious that I shouldn't get near your wife," said Spurling; "she must be very valuable."

Granger went off and soon returned with fuel. The stove was damp and rusty, and did not draw well at first, so that all the room was filled with smoke. Spurling had stumbled over to the shelf and lay there complaining. When the wood had caught and was burning brightly, Granger fetched him something to eat and then went out to speak with Peggy, leaving him alone, promising to return again to spend the night.

When he had entered the shack, it appeared to be empty. He called Peggy's name, but she did not reply. Listening intently, he heard the sound of sobbing which she was endeavouring to stifle. Going over to the berth he found her lying there, with face turned to the wall. Sitting down beside her, he placed his arms about her, and tried to make her turn his way, but she refused to be comforted.

"Peggy," he said, "you heard what we were saying in the cabin? You remember how I said that I was able

to trust your word. I want you to promise me that you will not tell anyone that we have left, and that you will not try to follow until I send to tell you that all is safe, so that you can come to me."

"You will never send," she said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because that man will quarrel with you and kill you on the way out."

"That's nonsense; you must listen to what I have planned. This summer we found gold on the Forbidden River."

"I know that."

"Who told you?"

"Eyelids."

"Why did he tell you?"

"He found it himself in the spring, when father sent him up there after Spurling; and he was angry when he knew that you had gone there, because he wanted it for himself."

"Did he stop here all summer?"

"Yes, but father went away. I think he must have followed you. He got back four days before your return."

"Humph! I suspected that, for I saw something that was very like him there. . . . And do you still think that they have gone to tell the Mounted Police only in order that Spurling may be arrested?"

"I don't know; but that's what they said. I chose to believe them because that was the only way in which I could keep you for myself."

"Well, then, listen. No matter what Eyelids and Beorn may intend, if the Mounted Police once get hold of me the result will be that I shall get hanged. The

one way in which you can keep me for yourself is to help me to escape. I can't take you with me as you are at present; you know that. And I can't strike the trail alone; I must have someone to help me take the gold out. There's no one but Spurling. Besides, I've promised to stick by him; he saved my life once, and I'm paying back the debt. When once I've reached Winnipeg, I'll be able to purchase friends who will hide me, if need be; but I hope to get there ahead of the news of my escape, before the police have my description and are on the lookout. I shall strike for the south, and, when the hunt is over and I'm given up for dead, I'll send you word where you can join me."

"You never will do that."

"And why not?"

"Because you will be dead."

Granger was losing patience. Whatever reasoning he used, he could not move her beyond that one assertion.

"Won't you help me to take the one chance of life that I think I have?" he said. "It can't make much difference to you if Spurling does kill me on the trail; if I stay here, I shall die a few weeks later, more disgracefully."

She stood up and led him over to the window, through which the moon was shining, so that he could see her face. She placed her arms about his neck, as if she were a white woman. "I will tell you the truth now," she said; "I have been keeping something back that I might save you from yourself. Since you joined with this man and helped him take the gold from the Forbidden River, Eyelids and my father have both become your enemies. The factor did send his message that your life would be spared if Spurling was given up,

but I think he was speaking falsely. I have tried to keep you near me because I alone, if need be, can stand between you and them. If you set out with Spurling, he will kill you; and if you stay here, you will be arrested. But if you will come with me into the forest, we can join some Indians of my mother's tribe, and they will hide us where you never can be found."

Granger watched her while she was speaking, wondering whether he was hearing the very truth this time. "And, if I do as you ask me, what will happen to Spurling?" he said.

She drew him nearer to herself. "I hate that man," she whispered; "let him die as he deserves."

"And why didn't you tell me everything at first?"

"Because you are not strong enough to make the journey yet; and I wanted to keep you resting here, till you had no other choice of saving yourself but by following me into the forest. While my father was present, I did not dare to tell you — *for his soul is dead.*"

Granger took his eyes from off her face; she tempted him — he had been so long unused to kindness. He gazed out of the window, far away across the frozen forest, and heard the dream of his boyhood calling to him to seek the city out of sight. His choice lay between this woman and El Dorado, in whose search he had wasted all his life. He did not deceive himself, whatever he might say aloud; his hesitancy did not arise out of unwillingness to desert Spurling, but from unwillingness to abandon the quest while a fragment of hope remained. With that stolen gold, if he could slip by the winter patrol and carry it out to Winnipeg, he would be able to strike for the south and sail up the Great Amana, past the rocks with the forgotten hand-

writing, till he came to the lake of Parima, on whose shores the city is said to stand.

She saw that his will was wavering and that his choice was going against her. Seizing his hands in her own and pressing them to her breast, "I am only a poor half-breed girl," she cried, "but I am soon to be the mother of your child; and our child will be nearly all white like yourself. You can't think what my life was before you came to me; for, though my body is half Indian, my mind has become a white woman's since I went to school in Winnipeg. I am so white that I would die for you to-morrow, if I could give you life by doing that. I could not tell you this before, while my father and brother were present; somehow, with their silence they stifled my words, and made me silent. But don't judge me by the past months, believe me now."

"Peggy," he said, "what should we do in the forest, if we went there and joined your mother's tribe? We should starve, and grow sullen; and you would be treated as a squaw, and our child would grow up an Indian."

"But I should not mind that if only we were together."

"But we shall be together if my plan works out and I manage to escape. Then there's Spurling; however much I hate him, I cannot break my promise to him and leave him to die."

She dropped his hands and drew away from him. "You are going to meet the white woman," she said; "you had planned to desert me whatever happened."

"Who told you that?"

"Your lips told me, when you were sick and they moved of themselves."

"But I promise you now that, when I am safe, I will send you word so that you can find me. If I ever did think of deserting you, it was before I knew that we were going to have a child."

"You will not send for me," she said; "but I promise that I will do nothing to you that will hinder you from going out."

"But what will you do when I am gone, and you yourself will be needing help?"

"I shall go, like any other squaw, to the Indian women of my tribe."

There was nothing more to be said; she had given him what he had asked. Bidding her good-night, he left the shack.

On returning to the Hall, he found Spurling very restless. "What have you been doing all this time?" he asked. "I'd got a good mind to come in search of you. I thought you must have struck the trail with your squaw, leaving me behind."

Granger pretended not to notice his ill-nature, but told him what he had arranged. They talked matters over and determined to make a start on the following night. Neither of them were in proper condition to travel, but they knew that they had no time to waste. Before they lay down to sleep, Spurling altered his position, spreading his furs between the stove and the entrance, with his head so near the threshold that the door could not be opened wide enough to permit of anyone passing out without his being wakened. Granger smiled grimly, wondering how long it would take them to quarrel at that rate, when one of them thought it necessary to take such precautions. Spurling was soon snoring, but Granger could get no rest. The night was

bitterly cold, and the fire needed constant replenishing. It seemed to him that no sooner had he piled on more wood, and wrapped himself in his blankets, and laid himself down, than he would feel the temperature lowering, and a chill passing over his body like an icy hand, beginning at his feet and working up to his head. Shivering and with teeth chattering, he would raise himself up on his elbow, only to see that the wood was again burnt through and that the fire was going out.

At last he determined to give up the attempt to sleep. Pulling a box near the stove and using it as a back-rest, he gathered his blankets tightly round him and lit his pipe.

Across his shoulders, through the window behind him, fell a shaft of moonlight; in front of him, dazzling his eyes, was the redness of the glowing charcoal, and the yellow of the jumping flames; within hand-stretch to the right lay Spurling, with his feet toward the fire and his head within six inches of the threshold. In the great stillness which was outside, nothing was to be heard save the rustling of the snow as it bound tighter, and the occasional low booming of the trees as the frost, acting on the sap, bent their branches.

With his accustomed passion for fairness, he commenced to examine his dealings with Peggy and to try to regard his actions from her view-point. In his recent conversation with her she had revealed qualities the existence of which he had not suspected; he had not reckoned her at her true worth. He began to be uncertain even now as to whether he was doing right in leaving her. Perhaps she, for all her ignorance, was wiser than himself. But of one thing she had made him certain, that of all creatures which walked, and

talked, and ate, and drank, upon the earth, she alone stood by him in his crisis for an unselfish reason, and loved him for himself. He knew now, though he had not realised it until that night, that he loved her in return, half-breed though she was, and could not do without her. He was willing to own to himself that, in his treatment of her, he had not always been just and, because of her race, at times had been despising. He'd been more or less of a fool, and had refused a good deal of available happiness.

He looked towards the door; if it had not been for the unpleasantness of awaking Spurling, he would have gone at once to the shack and said to her, "I don't mind who you are, I love you better than any white girl, and would prefer you from amongst them all, were I again given my choice." Before he set out, he would like to have her believe that he was going, at least partly, for her sake.

The smoke from the burning wood made his eyes grow heavy; he began to drowse. He dreamt that he had taken Peggy's advice and had gone with her into the forest, having joined himself to the people of her tribe. It must have happened years ago, for their child was a sturdy boy who ran beside them. She was leading the way through a dark wood, holding him by the hand. He asked her where she was going, and for answer she laid her finger on his lips and only smiled. On and on they went, and then, far away in the distance, he began to see a little light. It grew brighter and more dazzling as they approached, so that he had to close his eyes. Presently she halted and told him to look. He was standing on the edge of a precipice, in the side of which steps had been hewn out, and far

below was a silver lake which he knew to be Parima; and far away was a gleaming of domes and spires which he recognised. He was about to speak to thank her, when he tottered and his feet sank from under him. As he fell, he stared up at her; the last thing he saw was the expression of agony that was in her eyes.

He awoke with a start, but his instinct warned him not to stir. The shaft of moonlight had been blotted out, and he knew that someone, standing outside, behind him, was gazing in through the window. It was not Spurling, for he lay breathing heavily, fast asleep, over to his right. As he crouched there motionless, he ran through the list of all possible assailants in his mind. It might be Beorn or Eyelids. It might be Robert Pilgrim. It might even be the Mounted Police, arrived before their time. It might be only a renegade trapper of the Hudson Bay Company, who had come by night, that he might not be discovered, to see if the private trader would offer a higher price for his catch of furs. Then the darkness was removed, and the light shone in again. Quickly turning his head, he looked toward the window, and saw nothing there. Very quietly he rose to his feet, tiptoed to the window and looked out. At first he could see no one; then he saw the outer edge of a figure, pressed close to the wall of the house, standing upright beside the door-jamb. He crept back from the panes, so that he should not obscure the little light he had. Moving over to the right, he halted midway between the window and Spurling.

He could hear the muffled breathing of the person outside and could almost feel the pressure of his body against the wall on the other side. In the few seconds' respite, while nothing happened, he glanced round,

taking in the situation and trying to forecast the probable sequence of action. Since Spurling had lain down, he had altered his position, so that now his body stretched across the entrance, with his head in the corner where the two walls met, forming an acute angle with the threshold so that, though he prevented the door from opening more than two or three inches, directly it was opened his person would be visible, and exposed to attack.

Gently the latch was raised and, by slow degrees, the door began to swing inwards. The slit which it made let in a narrow ray of moonlight, which, leaving Spurling's face in shadow, fell slanting across his neck. If he had not moved in his sleep, his head would have been farther out from the wall, and the light, striking on his eyes would have aroused him; as it was, he was undisturbed. Alert with the horror of it, Granger watched to see what would follow next. The person on the other side, peering through the opening, had been warned by the same sight of the exposed bare neck, and, desisting from pushing the door wider, was deliberating.

When a short interval had elapsed, he saw a hand thrust through the crack; it gripped a trapper's hunting knife, with the blade pointing downwards, and was poised about to strike. Granger was unarmed himself; there was but one thing that could be done to save his comrade's life. Flinging all his weight upon the door, he closed it, imprisoning the assailant's hand above the wrist joint. The knife clattered to the floor, where it stuck out quivering, grazing Spurling's cheek as it fell. The hand tried to wrench itself free, the fingers opening and closing convulsively, but there was no sound from outside.

Spurling awoke with a cry, and clapping his hand to his face found it wet with blood. He rose to his feet with his fists clenched, and the look of a wild beast at bay in his eyes. His lips were working with nervousness and desire to fight. "What is it?" he whispered. "Have they come to take us?"

Granger signed to him to stand back and keep quiet. Then he followed the direction of Granger's eyes, and he also saw the hand. Bending down, with his back against the door, Granger examined it. It was brown and slim—far too small for a man's hand, and far too dusky to belong to a person who was white. The light, stealing in through the aperture, showed it plainly and fell along its length; the fingers had ceased to writhe and were extended, as if the thing had died.

While Granger had been looking, Spurling also had seen and had surmised. Coming swiftly forward, he stooped to pick up the knife. Granger read his purpose and, as he leant forward to pluck it from the boards, kicked him heavily in the chest, so that he lost his balance and fell sprawling on his back. Before he could recover himself, he had opened the door and released the hand. Possessing himself of the knife, he set his back against the door again to prevent Spurling from following. There was a little cry of gladness, and the sound of footsteps rustling the snow as they hurried away.

For the remainder of the long night, he stood guard over the man whom he had rescued. When the dawn broke and he visited the shack, he found that Peggy had vanished.

CHAPTER XX

SPURLING TAKES FRIGHT

If Spurling had suspected Granger before, he was doubly suspicious of him now. Wherever he went, his heavy treacherous eyes followed and spied upon him. In one thing only were they united — in their desire to see the last of Murder Point. For the accomplishment of this end, they laboured feverishly in sullen silence. On visiting the dog-pen, they found that of the eleven huskies which had been there, three were missing; of the eight which remained, four were the animals left over from the grey team belonging to Spurling, and these were the best. This meant that they would be able to harness but four dogs apiece to a sled, and would have to leave some of their wealth behind, limiting each outfit together with the gold to not more than three hundred pounds. On examining his clothing, Granger found that his favourite capote was not there; he conjectured that Peggy had taken that also in her hurry.

They went to the store and selected their provisions with care, taking no flour or canned goods, but tallow and fat bacon, because this food is least bulky and affords most nourishment. For the same reason, instead of the usual allowance for a husky of two raw white fish a day, they took lumps of grease frozen solid. Of the gold they took mostly dust, because it packed closer than nuggets. This they divided into equal

shares and poured into moose-hide sacks, which they lashed to the bottom of their sleds, with their outfit above.

They clothed themselves warmly for the journey, for already there were forty degrees of frost, and this was but November. They put on three flannel shirts apiece and one of duffel, and over them a beaded shirt of leather. They swathed their feet in duffel, covering them with high moccasins, and encased their legs in several wrappings of duffel leggins. Their caps were of fur, the hair of which reached down over their foreheads, ears, and necks, giving them protection. Over all they flung capotes, which extended to their knees and were caught in at the waist with a scarlet sash.

Having fed the huskies, Granger returned to the shack, to run through his belongings and destroy whatever he did not wish to be found. He turned to Spurling, saying, "You'd better lie down now and get a little rest."

Spurling blinked at him, and swallowed once or twice, hesitating. Then he said, "It's a pleasant meeting that they'll have, with two of us absent."

Granger was sorting out old letters, dated years back — things which brought memories. He did not pay any attention; perhaps he had not heard.

"It's a pleasant meeting that they'll have, I say, with two of us absent," Spurling repeated.

"What meeting? I don't understand."

"Why, the meeting you promised them on Christmas Eve — the one you were so pressing about."

Granger raised up his head and looked at him. "Don't you be so certain of that," he said; "we may not be absent — we may be caught by Eyelids and brought back."

Spurling cursed him under his breath.

Granger went on sorting out his papers, burning them or putting them aside. Some were from his mother; one was from his father, faded with age; and some were from girls whose very names had passed from his remembrance. Presently he stopped, and turning round again, with a different look in his eyes, handed a page to his companion, saying, "Read that."

Spurling laughed harshly and took it. It was in his own handwriting. "None of your softness," he said. "I've got long past sentiment."

Granger watched him as he scanned its contents, and saw his face grow solemn. It had been written seven years back, before they had left England, when both their sympathies were fresher, before their souls had grown tarnished. It read: "John, I've just seen the unemployed, about four battalions of 'em or from two to three thousand men — unemployed, half-clothed, half-fed, and half-men. God! that such a sight could be in this world, and here in London; our London, wealthy London, the city of luxury and at our own doors. Four battalions of men in real want; not a want such as you and I know when we run short of our damned tobacco, but a want when the belly is sick and empty and has no prospect of being filled — a want of necessities. Four battalions of men in want, and how many children and women does that represent? God's hooligans, God's scamps, and God's wrecks! '*His wrecks*,' how can I write such words. How pitiable are their physical conditions, their privation and distress of body! But what of their souls, the starvation of their minds? Why, I doubt if they could subscribe a respectable soul among the whole four battalions.

"Males who might have been men and of some use in

the world, if only a finger had shown them the road instead of shoving 'em down into wrecks and damnation.

"I can write no more. I must go out and walk about."

Spurling gulped down a sob, and without comment crunched the sheet up in his hand, and flung it towards the stove; but it fell short and rolled to where Granger was standing. He stooped, picked it up and smoothed it out. "I'll put it in my pocket," he said, "to remember what we were; we may need the reminder on our journey."

"Damn your softness," Spurling broke out. "I want to forget the past, and to live like the beast I am. How could I shoot down even an Indian to defend myself, if I were to remember things like that! It's gold that's changed me; and now that I've got it I intend, at all costs, to win out."

"Yes, it's gold that's changed us," Granger said.

Presently he paused again. "I had intended to keep that to threaten you with, but you can have it now," he said.

Spurling rose up from the floor, and coming over to the table took the paper from him. It was the warrant for his arrest. His hand shook as he read it.

"Granger, how did you get that?" he asked in a low voice. "Was it from Strangeways?"

On the spur of the moment, to avoid the direct answering of the question and that he might learn the exact truth about something else, he drew forth the locket from his breast.

"What's that?" asked Spurling. "Another reminder?"

"Come and look for yourself."

"I don't want to remember, I tell you."

"But this has something to do with the answer to your question."

Spurling came behind and looked over his shoulder carelessly, not expecting to see anything which was of much concern. Then he started, so violently that the portrait fell from Granger's hand. "My God, it *was* a woman!" he moaned. "A woman! A woman!"

Granger turned upon him, willing to be angry; but he saw that he had no need of further revenge. The man's body seemed to have shrunk into itself, and to have grown smaller. His lower jaw hung down, giving a purposeless expression to the face and mouth. The eyes were vacant and stared out on space, focussing nothing. Whatever anger he had had was turned to pity as he regarded him. So Spurling had not known that Mordaunt was a woman! And the body which was found at Forty-Mile had not been clothed in a woman's dress! How Strangeways must be laughing out there, alone in the coldness, three feet beneath the snow at the bend!

Yet, for all his pity, Granger could not bring himself to touch the man—he looked too absorbed in his tragedy. Out of decency he turned his back upon him, hurrying his task to an end. Already he had been too long about it; they had no time to linger. Peggy's absence might have many purposes; when she returned, she might not come unaccompanied. Before he made a start, after his night of watching he would require rest.

Spurling had drawn away from him and was huddled in a corner, whispering to himself. He must say and do something to brace him up, and show to him that in his eyes he was still a man. If he didn't recover quickly, they would have to postpone their journey. He was a fool to have shown him that.

The last of the papers had been burned; he tied the few which he had preserved into a little bundle, and thrust them in his breast. Going over to Spurling, he laid his hand on his shoulder and said, "Druce, old fellow, I'm very tired. I want to take an hour's sleep before we set out. You'd best watch and see that nothing happens. In two hours it'll be sunset; wake me before then."

He raised up his haggard face and nodded, but he did not look at him squarely. Granger, having made up the fire, laid himself down.

When he awoke, he found that the room was in darkness; it must have been night for several hours. It was the coldness which had aroused him, for the fire had gone out.

He supposed that Spurling must be sleeping, so he called to him, "Spurling, Spurling, are you there?"

There was no answer. He listened for his breathing, but could hear nothing. Getting upon his feet as swiftly as the stiffness of his muscles would allow, he groped his way over to the corner where he had last seen him. He was not there. Then he lit the lamp, and saw that the room was empty.

His first thought was that, in his despair, he had gone outside and shot himself. Recalling his uncanny horror of the bend, he fancied that he could trace madness in all his recent actions; but then he remembered that his fear of the bend had been shared. He became possessed of a new and more personal dread. What if in giving him the warrant and showing him the portrait, he had told him too much — more than his courage and honesty could bear? He rushed to the door of the shack, and out to where the sleds and huskies had been

left. One of the sleds was gone; his own outfit lay scattered on the snow and the gold had been taken. But he made a yet worse discovery, for of the eight huskies only two remained; Spurling's four gray dogs and the two best of his own team were missing. He looked wildly round on the great emptiness. The night pressed down on the earth, as though to imprison it; the forest closed in on the river, menacing and silent; and the river ran on, a level, untravelled roadway, from the west. He shouted, and cursed, and called down God's vengeance on Spurling. Then, for a moment he was quiet, and heard his own voice coming back to him as an echo from the bend. His voice had tried to escape and was returning to him because it could find no way out.

Crazily turning his face down-river, he shouted, "Hey, Strangeways, may God damn Spurling."

Muffled, as if the dead man were answering him from underground, the cry came back, "Hey, Strangeways, may God damn Spurling."

He covered his face with his hands and sat down in the snow laughing. It was all a cruel jest. "Oh, the hypocrite! The hypocrite!" he shrieked. "He came here hunted and I helped him with my life. He has taken everything, and given me death."

Through his head ran maddeningly the scraps of the conversation he had had with Peggy: "I'll strike for the south, and, when the hunt is over, I'll send you word where you can join me." "You never will do that." "And why not?" "Because you will be dead."

On all his thought, as if she were sitting at his side, her voice broke in persistently, drearily and low-pitched reiterating, "Because you will be dead. Because you will be dead."

A hard look came into his eyes; he ceased from his laughing and whispering. Turning to the quarter behind his back from which he had seemed to hear her speaking last, he said quietly, "But I shan't be dead."

Then he rose up and entered the shack.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MURDER IN THE SKY

However lightly he travels and however hard the snow may have packed, a man who has only two huskies and is handicapped by a body just recovered from sickness does not make much speed in winter travelling.

Through the long hours of the dreary November night Granger, with hard, set face, had pushed on up the Last Chance River, towards God's Voice, following in Spurling's tracks. It was the gold that he desired. And if he recaptured it, what then? He was not capable of carrying it out to Winnipeg by himself. He knew that his pursuit was madness; he had nothing to gain by it but revenge. He was hardly likely to gain even that, for the man in front of him had three dogs to his one, fuller rations, and a start of several hours; he could only hope to overtake him by the happening of some accident.

Yet he knew that he would overtake him, for he felt, beyond reach of argument, that Spurling was fated to die by his hand. Both of them had striven to avoid it; once he himself had fled that he might not commit the crime, and Spurling was now trying to escape that it might not come about. No matter what they did, it must happen. Though God should "advance a terrible right arm," and pluck them apart, and fling them to the opposite extremes of the world, they would surely

travel and travel, perhaps involuntarily, till they came again together. It would have been far better if he had not been interfered with at the Shallows and had been permitted to accomplish his enmity there — so, more than three years of futile suffering might have been spared and Mordaunt would be still alive.

He was hardly conscious of any anger; his was the unreasoned relentless instinct of the pursuing hound. He was savage justice and the law of self-preservation personified. He was the will of destiny decreeing that Spurling should not reach El Dorado alive.

The dogs struggled on uncomplainingly; this was their first trip of the season and they were still comparatively fresh, though the man was tired. To the eastward the crescent of a faint old moon hung low in the sky. As Granger ran, he turned his head and, watching it, was thankful to see that at last the tardy dawn had begun to spread. Over the withered stretch of woodland to his right the Aurora swept between the stars, like an extinguishing angel, who caused them to flicker and, as he beat his wings about them, one by one to go out.

It was a morning of bitter coldness. As the breath left his nostrils, he could almost see it congeal and fall to the ground, a filmy sheet of ice. The heads of the huskies were clouded with smoke, so that they seemed to be on fire as they panted forward dragging on the traces.

The tracks, which he was following, now branched off to the left, and, mounting the river-bank, entered into a little hollow at the edge of the forest. Here, about the base of a tree, the snow had been recently trampled and a fire smouldered. It was Spurling's first

camp. Granger, having unharnessed and fed his huskies, taking his axe from his girdle, cut down a sapling fir and roused the dying embers to a blaze. The flames shot up, and, climbing the bark of the tree, crackled among the branches overhead. Unpacking his tallow he melted it in a cup. Before it was all drunk, the surface was frozen solid. Then, lest his muscles should stiffen, he set out again.

The air was full of minute particles of snow, like frozen dew, which caused the whole atmosphere, as far as eye could reach, to sparkle in the sunshine. The sky was greenish grey and without a cloud. The stillness of the world was magical; in the miles of landscape which were visible, nothing stirred. The snapping of a twig sounded like the crashing ruin of a forest giant. The gliding of the sled across the snow, and the padding footsteps of the huskies, thundered down the tunnel of the river through the pines like the galloping of heavy artillery over gravel. When, at rare intervals, the river cracked, perhaps four or five miles away, it reverberated through the tree-tops, causing their burden of snow to tremble and glisten, like the report of neighbouring cannon. Every whisper was exaggerated to a shout, so that the ears were deafened and longed for quiet — quiet which, unlike silence, consisted of a multitude of small sounds singing, almost inaudibly, together.

Shortly after noon the light faded, and the blinding whiteness was converted into iron grey. Over to the westward the sun was hidden, and the horizon became threatening with a leaden bank of cloud. The temperature sank lower and the twilight was obliterated; night rushed down.

The dogs were now thoroughly worn out; only by

continual lashing could he keep them to their work. The roughness of the ice had mangled their feet; they marked out the trail which they traversed with crimson dots of blood. He had hoped to reach Spurling's next camping-place before making another halt; but his rate of travelling had grown slower, and already the advantage of Spurling's four additional huskies was beginning to tell. At last his dogs lay down in their traces and refused to budge. He knew that he could force them to go no further.

Using the sled as a shovel, he dug out a hollow, throwing up a circular mount to protect him from the wind, should it arise. Searching along the river-bank, he collected wood for a fire, sufficient to last him till morning. He set up his sled on end, like a tombstone, for a head rest, and lay himself down with his feet toward the blaze. The dogs gathered round him shivering, lying one on either side, striving to share the warmth of his body. He beat them off at first, but they always crept back; so at last, becoming languidly sorry for them, he let them stop there.

He was terribly tired; his bones felt like bars of red-hot iron scorching their way through his flesh. The hardness of the ice beneath the snow surface had racked his body in every joint. Every now and then he would get up and throw some wood on the fire, and lie down again, pulling his blanket over his head, folding his arms tightly across his chest, and gathering his knees up close to his body to conserve whatever heat he had. Though his body slept, never for a second did his brain lose consciousness of the cold and of the sense of travel. Always he seemed to be pressing on, doggedly, wearily, with the forest rushing past him on

either hand. Spurling was in sight; sometimes he would halt, and jeeringly beckon to him. When he had come within speaking distance of him, he would start off again, leaving a narrow track of gold behind, for one of the sacks had burst.

Gradually the most fatal feeling that any man can experience in northland travel stole upon him — *he felt that he did not care.* If the fire went out, what matter? He would not get up to relight it. If Spurling were standing at his side, he would not disturb himself to look at him. If Mordaunt were to come to him, well, he might perhaps turn round to look at her.

He began to dream of her as he had seen her in the locket. They were both back in the old homeland. He was talking with her in an English garden and a thrush was singing overhead. How long it was since he had listened to the song of any bird! Why, he had almost forgotten that there was such an ecstasy in the world. So exalted was he, that he paid more attention to the thrush's song than to the words which Mordaunt said. Then she grew angry and shook him; but he sat there motionless, looking up into the branches of the tree, away from her, watching the sun through the greenness of the leaves, and the quivering throat of the bird. She rose up and left him in indignation; then darkness fell. He tried to follow her, but had no power to move himself. He tried to cry out, but his tongue was joined to the roof of his mouth. Making a great effort, he came to himself.

When he pushed up his arms to throw off his covering, they seemed to be lifting a weight of surpassing heaviness. He sat upright and tried to open his eyes; he was blind — he could see nothing. He groped to feel

his eyeballs with his hands; but his fingers were frozen — they could feel nothing. He rose to his feet in panic and stood there swaying, as though he had been set upon a dizzy pedestal which had grown to be part of himself, so that he could not move, but could only bend.

"I must keep quiet," he told himself; "I must keep quiet. If I get frightened, I shall wander away to my death."

When he tried to step forward his feet clapped together like solid blocks of ice. Very distantly, it seemed to him, he could make out a little glow of red and feel a breath of warmness. Going down on his hands and knees, he crawled towards it. It was coming to meet him; they had met. He lay down beside the redness and his panic left him.

Then he became conscious that it was hurting him and he commenced to hate it. In struggling to get away from it, he found that he could move more freely. Sensation had come into his hands; raising them he felt his eyes. His great terror was not of death, but that he should be forever sightless. He ran his fingers across his eyes and found that they were covered with flesh — that his eyelids were frozen together. With his two hands he forced them apart, and gazed about him. Wherever he looked there was endless space with nothing to deter him, stretching away on every side. The moon, in her last quarter, was barely visible — a mere shadow of silver in the sky; so indistinct was his vision, that it seemed to him as though he were looking at the image of the firmament reflected in water, rather than at the stars themselves. Yet, in the certain renewal of his sight, there came to him a gladness which he had not known for many a day.

When he turned toward the fire, he perceived the cause of his mishap: he had overslept himself and it was nearly out. By the way in which it was scattered abroad and the smouldering of the fur which was about his throat and arms, he guessed that in his blindness and instinctive desire for warmth, he had thrown himself upon its ashes. Having gathered what remained of it together, he flung on more fuel and set to work to chafe his extremities, restoring circulation. He was too chilled to think of attempting sleep again that night: so, when his limbs were sufficiently thawed out, he renewed his journey.

The atmosphere was wonderfully clear, but there was in the air a sense of evil and foreboding. Even the dogs seemed to be aware of it, for as they ran, turning their heads from side to side to see which way the whip was coming that they might dodge it, there was a look of foreknowledge and terror in their eyes which warned Granger.

As the dawn was spreading, he was startled by a long-drawn sigh, which travelled from horizon to horizon and died out. The dogs heard it, and sitting down abruptly in their tracks nearly overturned the sled. Gazing away to the northward, he saw a shadowy cloud arise, whirl and drift languidly over the tree-tops and fall back again out of sight. He lashed at the huskies, and with difficulty set them going. But the sled drew heavily, as though it were being dragged through sand, for the snow was gritty as the seashore: so intense was the cold that all slipperiness had gone out of it. He fastened a line to the load and went on ahead, breaking the trail and hauling with all his strength.

Before long the sigh was heard again; but this time

it came nearer, and columns of white smoke rose up and danced in the river-bed. Then he knew that he was in for a *poudre* day — the day which of all others the winter voyageur holds in most dread. While such weather lasts, even the hardiest traveller will refuse to leave his fire; for he knows that before long every landmark will be blotted out, that his very dogs will refuse to obey him, and that to-morrow, when the wind has dropped and the snow has settled, the chances are that the sun will find him with a quiet face turned upward to the sky, immobile and statuesque as if carved from Parian marble.

Leaving Spurling's trail, he ascended the bank and worked along by the forest's edge, that so he might gain shelter. With every fresh puff of breath from the north, the coiling snakes of snow grew larger, writhing across the tree-tops and pouring tumultuously into the river-bed, where they rioted and fought till the day grew dark and it was difficult to see the next step. Respiration became painful, but Granger was determined not to halt, for this was one of the accidents which would help him to come up with Spurling. Feeling his way from tree to tree, he struggled on. His head became dizzy with the effort. His body, for all its coldness, broke out into a chilly sweat. He was invaded by a terrible inertia, so that he was half-minded to lie down and go to sleep; but the thought that Spurling had halted somewhere, perhaps only twenty miles ahead, and was losing time, drew him on. Presently his dogs sat down again, lifting their voices above the storm in a dismal wailing.

He cut their traces and went forward, dragging the sled himself. They followed him a few paces behind,

slinking through the darkness with their heads down and their tails between their legs. They reminded him of the timber-wolf on the Forbidden River; there were times when, catching a partial glimpse of them, he could have sworn that they had been joined by a third.

By midday the wind died down, the atmosphere began to clear and the snow to settle. Returning to the river he sought in vain for Spurling's tracks; either he had passed him in the blackness or they had been obliterated. He would know the truth in the next six hours for, if he were still ahead, he would come to his abandoned camp.

Towards sunset he halted and lit a fire; he intended to travel through the night and was in need of rest. He had fed his huskies and was stooping above the flames, cooking himself some bacon, when he raised his eyes to the west. For a minute he crouched, gazing with the fascination of horror at what he saw taking place apparently not more than fifty yards away, but with such clearness that it might not have been more than ten paces. Where ten seconds before there had been nothing in view but the straight length of river and the snow-capped forest, dripping with icicles, there was now, hanging above the trees face-downwards, anchored to the sky by crimson threads, the inverted image of a portage, leading up from the right-hand bank of a river, hedged in on either side with a row of crosses which marked graves of bygone voyageurs. Midway in the path was a little cabin, which had been set up for the shelter of bestormed travellers by employees of the Hudson Bay. Granger recognised the place; it was Dead Rat Portage, and must be at least fifteen miles from where he was now standing and ten from God's Voice.

Out of the cabin, on his hands and knees, crawled a man. He was evidently badly frost-bitten, for he tried to drag himself upright by the door-post, but failed miserably, falling forward along the ground. As he lay there, he turned toward Granger a face which was expressionless as if it had been covered with a mask of waxen leprosy; it was frozen solid, as were his feet and hands. Granger knew, more by the clothes than the ghastly features, that the man was Spurling.

He seemed now to have given up hope of standing erect, and began to move painfully on all fours across the snow to where a log of rotten wood was lying. Having reached it, he tried to raise it, but there was not the strength in his hands. He tried to fasten his teeth upon it, to drag it back with him; but his jaws seemed paralysed. Then he crept back to the cabin.

Soon he came out again, and, having reached the log, commenced to light it with a match. At first it refused to ignite, but when he had pushed some broken twigs under it, it burst into flame. He bent over it hungrily, drawing so near that Granger expected to see his clothing catch fire.

Then, as he watched, he saw a second figure. It was that of a man, dressed precisely as he himself was dressed, and his back was turned towards him so that he could not discern his face; he carried in his hand an axe. He moved stealthily on snowshoes, dodging from tree to tree, lest he should be discovered by the crouching man. His intention was so evidently evil, that Granger cried out a warning to save Spurling. Murder, when watched in this way, was so brutal that, though he himself had planned to do the deed, his whole

moral nature revolted against it now. He cried again, but his warning was not heard. He wished that the man with the axe would turn his head, that he might see his face.

A horrible, grotesque suspicion was growing up within him; he fancied that he knew the man — that he had seen him before in the Klondike, *that he was himself*. Spurling, quite unaware of his danger, was holding out his hands to the flames; it was not until the man was close behind him that he heard his footsteps and turned his head. His face was frozen; the frost had bound him hand and foot, making him defenceless, so that he could hardly stir; the only means of appeal he had was the expression in his eyes.

Granger thought that he saw that expression—the cornered soul gesticulating, shrieking for mercy from the living eyes in the half-dead face. When the murderer raised his axe, he saw the soul's pitiful cowardice and how it shrank. The axe came crashing down. There was no need to strike twice; he fell limply backward, throwing his arms out wide—and there was an end of El Dorado and of all his dreams of avarice.

The murderer, as if suddenly afraid of his own handiwork, without turning his head, hurried on across the portage through the forest, and was quickly lost to sight.

Scenting the blood, the four gray huskies, one by one, came out from the cabin, where they seemed to have been asleep, and the others followed them. They came slowly over to where their tyrant was lying, and sniffed his body. They did it cautiously, for as yet they had not lost their fear of him; he might awake and bèlabour them for disturbing his last long rest.

In falling his legs had shot from under him into the fire, scattering the embers, so he lay full length, with the red gash in his forehead, his arms spread out like a cross, and his face, in the inverted image, turned earthwards, gazing down on Granger and the Last Chance River with startled, unseeing eyes.

The mirage began to fade and float cloudwards, drifting up-river above the tree-tops higher and higher, till it vanished in the west.

Of all that he had witnessed Granger had heard no sound — there lay the chief terror of it. Like the handwriting on the wall in Babylon, it had taken place in silence. The crime which he had so often contemplated, and planned, had been transacted before his eyes; the person who had done the deed had kept his back turned toward him, but in his attire was strangely like himself — and instead of being gratified he was filled with loathing and hatred for the slayer.

In the person of another he had seen the vileness which he had been seeking for himself, and was horrified. He knew that, had he had his chance, he might have taken Spurling's life in just some such way as that—he had imagined how he would do it many times. And now that it was accomplished, he was sick with pity for the murdered man.

To one thing he had instantly made up his mind, that, if this should prove to be more than a fancy of delirium — the miraged portrayal of a villainy which had actually occurred — he would track the assassin as he had tracked Spurling, till the last ounce of his strength failed him, that Spurling might be avenged. Perhaps, in the avenging he hoped to clear himself in his own sight of his imagined share in the crime.

He felt as though the deed had been the result of his own projected hatred, and that he himself was the real murderer. When he remembered the appearance of the man whom he now followed, it seemed like going in pursuit of his own self.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BLIZZARD

Now that he was nearing God's Voice, it was necessary that he should travel more cautiously and keep a sharp lookout ahead. At any moment he might come in sight of a Company's trapper, either sitting beneath the trees by his camp-fire or racing down-river between the tall banks, following his sled. He might be recognised, and recognition would lead to his arrest. Whatever happened afterwards, he desired his freedom for yet a little while, so he went carefully. In the course of the night he passed by one wigwam; but the Indian was evidently away, for no dog rose up to herald his approach. If the squaw was there, she did not rouse; he got by unnoticed.

Hoping against hope, he argued with himself, trying to believe that Spurling was alive. He told himself that this had been a vision sent to him from God to turn him aside from his crime. He had gazed upon himself as he would have become, and his soul had revolted at the sight.

As he ran on, swearing at his huskies, urging them forward with the lash, he offered up to God many fervid thanks for the mercy which He had shown him, hoping that by these means, even though the calamity had happened, he might shame his Maker by his gratitude into putting back the hands of time, and so restoring

the murdered man to life. At last by the constant reiteration of the thing which he desired, he began to take it for granted that his prayer was answered. Spurling was not dead; he was alive, and he was going to ask his forgiveness for the evil which he had thought against him.

He put together the words which he would say to him when they met, and the gestures he would use to make his words convincing. He repeated them over many times that he might retain them in his memory. Then something would happen to take his attention away, one of the dogs would be shirking or the sled would have overturned, and, when he came back to the words which he had planned, he would be thrown into a frenzy, finding that they had slipped his mind.

Though he was desperately in earnest over this game at which he played, he was aware all the while of its unreality — that it was but a game. His sanity warned him that what he had seen had truly happened, and that the man was dead. This was not the first occasion upon which he had seen a mirage when the snow was down and the land was white. There had been times before, when, at the moment of daybreak or sunset, he had witnessed strange freaks of inverted forest and river hovering in the sky. Once he had seen an Indian ten miles away, attacking a wolf which had been caught by the leg in a steel trap, belonging to another man. So distinctly had he seen his features and dress that, at a later day, when he had brought in his winter catch of furs to exchange, he had recognised him; and when he had offered him the wolf-skin, had accused him of the theft. Moreover, he knew that, whether the sight which he had witnessed was mirage or fancy,

he did not deserve the leniency for which he prayed. He had had his chance and warning three times already: once in the Klondike; once after the arrival of Spurling, when God wrote upon the ice; and once at the bend, when in the company of Père Antoine he had mistaken the body of Strangeways for that of Spurling.

Then there was the appearance of the murderer to be accounted for, and his motive in slaying. He had been smaller in stature than himself, as had been the creature at the Shallows, but he had had the same peculiarities of clothing and was very much alike. Yet he strove to drive down all his doubts and to believe the thing which he desired — that the phenomenon was the result of imagination, and that Spurling was not dead.

He made small progress in his travelling, for his body was worn out by previous hardships. Sometimes he took over two hours to go three miles; it was long past midnight when Dead Rat Portage came in sight.

At this point the river made a large curve to the southward and broadened out into rapids; the portage was eight hundred yards in length and saved voyageurs six miles, crossing the neck of land by a narrow trail and picking up the Last Chance River on the other side. In summer time the York boats were unloaded here, and dragged across on rollers, the freight being carried on men's backs. As he drew near, his hope sank; the place looked so gloomy and forbidding. There were stories told about it and of how it had won its name, which might well make any man afraid. An old fort, established by the French at the time when they disputed the possession of Keewatin with Prince Rupert's Company, had once stood there; it was said that some of the crosses which fringed the trail marked

spots where its defenders lay buried. However, it was not the memory of the past, but the knowledge of what might now await him, which caused him to hesitate.

On the river's bank, where the portage commenced, was a cleared space, from which a path led round the cabin and tunnelled into the forest. As he eased his sled out of the river-bed, he caught the smell of burning, and, when he had topped the bank, he saw the glow of an almost extinguished fire. The overhanging trees, casting their network of shadows across the snow, prevented him from distinguishing at that distance any object that lay beneath them. While he halted, half inclined to wait till daybreak before proceeding further with his investigation, he was startled by the sound of footsteps. They came toward him very cautiously and there were many of them. He saw the glint of eyes in the darkness, shining out and disappearing among the crosses. He tried to count them; as far as he could make out there were six pairs. Then he called them softly by name, and there came toward him Spurling's four grey huskies and the two of his own team, which had been taken.

And still he clung desperately to his hope and would not allow himself to believe that in the shadow of the trees, a dozen yards from where he was standing, the man whom he had set out to kill was lying murdered. He whispered his name, not daring to speak louder. When no answer was returned, he rallied his retreating faith by saying, "He is sleeping. I must approach him gently. If he awakes and hears me, he may think I am his enemy and escape me."

Leaving his dogs, he stole toward the sparks of fire.

Although he still denied the mirage, telling himself that what he had seen was fancied, he directed his steps by that which he had witnessed in the sky.

Drawing nearer, he made out the smouldering log; cowardice prompted him to procrastinate, he crept round behind it. The air was heavy with the smell of scorching leather. His eyes growing more accustomed to the shadow, he saw the figure of a man, lying on the snow with his arms stretched out in the shape of a cross and his moccasined feet protruding above the glowing ashes. The last vestige of hope left him; he knew that Spurling was dead. With certainty, his power of decision returned; he still had a purpose to live for — to avenge this death.

Having pulled the body aside and heaped branches against the log, he rekindled the fire. In the light which it cast he could see the blurred trail of Spurling, where he had crawled to and from the cabin; also he could see the tracks which the slayer's snowshoes had left as he strode away through the forest following the portage. He stooped and examined them. By so doing he learnt a new fact — that the man who had done the deed was of Indian blood, for the toes of his footprints inclined to turn inwards, and in carrying his feet forward he had kept them closer together than does a white man; also he judged that he was lightly built, for the snow beneath his steps was not much crushed.

So Beorn was not the culprit, nor was his phantomself from the Klondike. He thought of Eyelids; but Eyelids was a tall man and his stride ought to have been longer. That which he had witnessed in the mirage led him to believe that the act had been pre-

meditated, and therefore had some strong motive; either it had been done for the reward or for the sake of theft.

He looked round for Spurling's sled and found it in the cabin; it was still loaded — the gold had not been touched. He was puzzled. If theft was not the object, why had the body been left? Without its production or some part of it that was recognisable, the thousand dollars would not be awarded. The best way to solve the mystery was to follow up the murderer; and, if he were to do that, there was no time to lose.

Dragging the remains into the cabin, he made fast the door, that the wolves might not destroy them; he would care for them on his homeward journey — if he survived to come back. Harnessing the four grey huskies into his sled, since they were the freshest, he set out across the portage. Turning his head, as he entered the forest, he took one last look at the deserted camp. The fire, burning brightly, with no one to sit by it, added the final touch to the general aspect of melancholy. Wailing through the darkness the huskies wandered; and in the background, when the flames shot up, appeared the crosses, bending one toward another, which marked the sleeping-places of men who, years since, had lived and suffered, and obtained their rest.

Beneath the trees, the gloom was so heavy that he could see nothing; but on coming out on to the banks of the river on the other side he again picked up the murderer's trail. It led up the Last Chance in a south-westerly direction towards God's Voice, which was only ten miles distant. He had begun to take it for granted that the man was a Hudson Bay employee, hurrying toward the fort to claim the reward, when the tracks,

branching off to the left, climbed out of the river and plunged into a low-lying, thickly wooded wilderness, striking due south.

In Keewatin the rivers are the only highways; to leave them even in summer time, if you have no guide and are not a man born in the district, is extremely dangerous; to do so in winter when, after every precaution has been taken, travel remains precarious, is to court almost certain death. For a moment Granger hesitated. He examined the prints of the snowshoes and saw that they were very recent. The man must have waited somewhere, and seen him coming. He must know now that he was being followed, and could not be far ahead. "Well, it's death whatever happens," thought Granger; "to go on to God's Voice is death; to return to Murder Point is death. I'd just as soon die by this man's hand, trying to avenge Spurling, as one cold morning in Winnipeg with a rope about my neck."

The day rose late and cloudy. The sun did not show itself. The sky weighed down upon the tree-tops, as if too heavy to support itself. Presently large flakes of snow, the size of feathers, drifted through the air, making a gentle rustling as they fell. Granger pressed on more hurriedly, for he feared that, if he dropped too far behind, the snow would cover up all traces of the man, and so he would escape him. Sometimes he fancied that he could hear him going on ahead, for every now and then a twig would snap. In the heat of his pursuit he took no account of direction.

About mid-day he halted; of late all sounds had grown rarer and the snow had thickened, causing even his own footprints to appear blurred a few seconds after

they had been made. Of the trail which he followed he could see nothing himself, trusting to his huskies' sense of smell to lead him aright.

Soon he grew strangely nervous, for he thought that he heard the crunch of snowshoes coming up behind. He persuaded himself that it was imagination, until his dogs, swinging round in a half-circle, began to travel back in a direction parallel to the route they had already traversed. He paused and listened again; behind him he could distinctly hear the sound of something stirring. Then he knew that he was no longer the pursuer.

His blood froze in his veins, and he began to lose confidence. He realised that if the murderer knew the district and was moving in a circle purposely, he was doing so in order that he might lure him to his death. Abandoning all thought of pursuit, his sole endeavour became to regain the river-bed. He lashed his dogs, urging them forward to the limit of their strength; but he came to nothing that was familiar; and, when he paused for breath, he could always hear the snowshoes following.

Then he awoke to the knowledge that he was lost. His first sensation was of blank bewilderment, producing in him an utter loss of memory. He strove to quiet himself, but his will-power refused to operate. Who he was, and why he was there, he could not remember; of two things only was he conscious, that he was pursued by something that was evil, and that he was lost.

A state of chaos reigned within him, which was soon succeeded by an all-pervading terror. He must escape somehow to safety, to a place where there were men. He longed to dash on somewhere, on and on; but he

was paralysed by his utter inability to think consecutively or to choose out any particular direction. He began to see horrible contorted shapes about him, and to imagine modes of death which were still more horrible. He might die of starvation, he might die of thirst, he might die of frost; but his worst fear was of something which he would never see, which would steal softly up, when he was too cold to turn his head, and strike him from behind. He circled round and round to avoid the blow; but he felt that, as he moved, the thing moved keeping pace with him, so that, for all his alertness, it was always behind his back.

In a way in which he had never desired it before, he longed for human companionship — just to look once more upon a living face. And to all these fears and yearnings there was the undertow of an added horror — the terror lest he should become insane. He burst into a passion of weeping; as the tears fell they froze upon his face. The air was thick with snow which the rising wind drifted about, driving it into curious and fantastic shapes. Had he been more quiet, he would have known that his only wise plan was to lie down until the blizzard was past. It would bury him, but as a covering it would act as a blanket to keep him warm. The blizzard seemed to him to be hemming him in, building up about him a shifting wall through which the pursuer could attack him unseen.

Always he was conscious of the pursuer's presence; always he could see the picture of Spurling's uplifted face and the pleading that was in his eyes as the assailant, with his back turned towards the onlooker, poised the axe above his head. That he might not share that fate he broke away into the greyness, tripping over

snow ridges, falling into drifts, and bruising his body against the trunks of trees in the madness of his flight. His huskies added to his panic by following him.

There were times when he ran so far ahead that he could neither see nor hear them; but, when he halted, panting, they would emerge and lay themselves down at his side. He hated them; they were sinister in his eyes. Had they not brought Spurling from Winnipeg, and had not their yellow-faced leader been the cause of Strangeways' death?

The wind, rising higher, shrieked among the branches. He wandered on, neither knowing nor caring where he went, for he had lost all sense of locality or time. There were intervals during which he must have dreamed and slept, for he passed down an endless street of tall houses, built in the English fashion, and the blinds were up and it was nightfall. On the windows danced the light of fires, burning on the hearths inside; and sometimes he could see the faces of children looking out at him. He held up his blue hands at them, making signs that they should let him in that he might warm himself; but they shook their heads mischievously, and ran away and laughed.

After one of these experiences, more real to him than the others, he came to himself. Surely that was the sound of music and dancing that came to him above the cry of the storm. He waited for a lull and listened, then followed the direction of the sound. As he drew nearer, he caught the thud of moccasined feet beating time upon a boarded floor, and snatches of the tune which the violin was playing. Something loomed up out of the darkness to meet him. He held out his hands to force it from him, and drove them against a

door. Then he knew that he had arrived at God's Voice.

He was half inclined to knock; at least they would not threaten him and drive him away this time as they had done in the previous winter. What was more likely to happen was that the man who opened to him, recognising him, would seize him by the throat, drag him inside and quickly slam the door. He would push him before him across the square till he came to the room where the trappers were dancing, where, in all probability, the factor was. And Robert Pilgrim when he saw him, wagging his red beard at him, would shout, "Ha, so you heard me whistle, and have come like a dog!"

He drew himself upright and stepped back from the gateway. No, he could not endure that. Any death was preferable to the price that he would have to pay for such shelter.

He worked his way along the wall till he stood beneath the window where the fort was assembled. It was a comfort to him to hear again the sound of voices. He listened to the fiddling and recognised it as that of Sandy McQuean, the half-breed son of a famous Orkney man. He had learnt his art from his father. They were all Scotch airs that he played. He could sing, when he chose, with a Highland accent, and had caught the knack of imbuing what he sang with an intolerable pathos.

The stamping of feet had ceased, but the violinist wandered on. Presently a new melody began to emerge from the improvisations, and a man's voice rose above the storm. The words he sang were *The Flowers o' the Forest:*

"I've seen the smiling
Of fortune beguiling;
I've felt all its favours, and found its decay;
Sweet was its blessing,
Kind its caressing;
But now 'tis fled—fled far away."

Granger shifted his feet uneasily as he listened, and half-turned to go.

As he did so, he found that someone was standing close behind him. He did not see his face, but one glance was enough to warn him. He dodged and ran to the river. The man was following him again. He took the direction which was open to him, and set out down-stream, returning to the portage.

The wind was dead against him, blinding his eyes and choking him with snow. He bowed his head and struggled on. He made a brave effort, but he knew that he was slowly freezing. His flesh was icy and his bones seemed heavy, weighing him down. The blood halted, and leapt forward, and halted in his veins and arteries, as though there were frequent stoppages past which it had to squeeze its way; he could hear it surging.

Gradually his physical pain grew less and, as it did so, his mind attained an unwonted clearness. He had somewhat the same experience as is said to come to drowning men in their last moments of consciousness. He was able to review his life as a whole and justly, attributing to each separate action its proper importance, and share of praise or blame. He realised that his hiding from Robert Pilgrim on Huskies' Island, journey to the Forbidden River, and pursuit of Spurling, had been one long series of mistakes, each one

tending to make him appear more guilty of Strangeways' death. He owned that all his life had been spent in avoiding his most obvious duties, and in setting himself hard tasks in exchange, which were impossible of accomplishment. His first duty had been towards his mother, and he had abandoned it nominally for the sake of a childish pledge, really for the glamour of El Dorado. His more recent duty had been to fulfil his obligations to his half-breed wife, especially now that she was about to bear him a child; he had forsaken her for his old dream's sake and for the sake of a revenge which he had persuaded himself was noble.

Reviewing these facts, he promised himself that, if ever he were given again the power of choice, he would return to Murder Point and live for her. Another matter became clear in his mind; that, when Spurling's body was discovered, if the man who had done the deed did not own up, he would be accused of the murder — and it *would* be murder, for it would be thought that he had killed him not in the cause of justice, but out of private spite. Morally he knew that he was the culprit and deserved to be hanged, for he had only avoided being guilty through the accident of having been forestalled in his crime.

He stumbled and fell full length in a drift. He did not try to rise. He had no fear of dying; his only desire was to get warm now. He pressed nearer to the snow and closed his eyes, and gradually lost consciousness.

He was awakened by someone rubbing his face vigorously. He resented the interference; he wanted the rest. Once he opened his eyes, and was blinded by a

roaring fire. As the warmth spread through him and his circulation returned, his body became very painful, as though it were being pierced by millions of red-hot needles. The agony of it brought him to himself.

A man was bending over him, whose face he could not see, for the hood was fastened before it, leaving only his eyes visible. By his dress he knew that he was his pursuer and Spurling's slayer. Again he was impressed with the fancy, not so much by his proportions which were smaller, but by his clothing, that he was very like himself. Languidly he awaited an opportunity to get another glimpse of his eyes; somehow they were familiar, he knew them. Then, because the man, murderer though he was, was saving his life, he turned away his head. He would not see anything which, in a weaker moment, might tempt him to give information in order that he might save himself.

The man, seeing that he was recovered and safe to be left, without a word of explanation glided off into the darkness.

Granger sat up and looked after him; he was puzzled by the memory of those eyes. He ran through all the list of his acquaintance, and could not place them. The blizzard had now subsided, and the stars shone overhead. He must have lain unconscious for some time before being found. All around him, and as far as eye could reach, the snow lay in short choppy waves, which took on the appearance of motion by reason of the shadows. As he watched, something lifted up its head above a ridge, and he saw that it was one of the huskies. Either his team had followed him, or the man had brought them with him. Rising to his feet, on the other side of the fire he saw his sled. He felt hungry, and going

towards it was about to get out some provisions, when he found that that was unnecessary; in the ashes a can of black tea was brewing and some bacon had been left, also a bundle of wood sufficient to last him till morning. He spent the remainder of the night there, and at daybreak continued his journey to the portage.

When he reached the cabin and pushed open the door, he found that it was occupied. An Indian, of the Sucker tribe, whom he had previously met, was sitting there. Looking round he saw that Spurling's body was in the same place and untouched, but that the load upon the sled had been rifled.

When he had offered him some tobacco, the Indian, jerking his head in the direction of the body, asked, "You kill him?"

Granger signed denial. The Indian looked doubtful. Then he said, pointing to the old tracks in the cabin which his snowshoes had left, "All the same, those your tracks."

Granger was in no mood for arguing, so he nodded assent. The Indian was silent for a while. Presently he rose to his feet and harnessed in his team. As he passed out of the door, he said, "You bad man. All the same, you kill him."

Granger followed him out and saw him crossing the portage towards God's Voice. He scraped a hole in the snow and buried Spurling.

On turning his attention to the sled, he saw that the Indian had taken everything except the gold. He poured out the dust and nuggets above Spurling's grave; it was the thing which he had loved most in life, as some men love goodness and flowers. To both

Spurling and himself it was worthless now; but it was the only offering which he had.

Leaving the mound sparkling white and yellow in the sunshine, he struck the trail down the Last Chance River, returning to Murder Point.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LAST CHANCE

SINCE the middle of November he had been back at the Point: it was now the day before Christmas, and Peggy was still absent. During the last six weeks he had waited anxiously, always listening, even in his sleep, for her returning footstep. It was extraordinary to him to notice how, now that he had lost her, every other affection that he had ever known became dwarfed and of no acount in comparison with his love of her. He no longer thought of Mordaunt or of El Dorado; all his anxiety was for the half-breed wife, whom he had once despised. There was but one ambition, the fulfilment of which he greatly desired, and that was again to see her and to look upon his child. Somewhere outside, beneath the grey chaos of white forest and gloomy sky, in the wigwam of a trapper, tended by Indian women, she had faced her ordeal and had, perhaps, survived. If ever he was to see her it would be to-night, when her kinsmen had promised to return.

At first, when he had left Dead Rat Portage, he had feared that he would be overtaken by the Mounted Police or Robert Pilgrim before ever he reached the Point. For six weeks he had remained there undisturbed and solitary.

Watching from his window day by day, he had seen an occasional Indian pass, averting his face and, if he

were a Catholic, crossing himself to avoid the overlooking of the evil eye. When such chance travellers approached the bend, he had noticed how they seemed to see something there, which he could not see, and climbing out of the river-trail, making a wide circuit, hurried their steps to get quickly by. Though he had spoken to no one for so long a time, he had not been lonely — watching for Peggy was a continual, if painful, source of excitement. And another matter had kept him fully occupied. Being an honest man, he knew that since the spring of the year he had not done well by his employers; therefore, since he thought it highly probable that, at any moment, he might be called away on a longer journey than any that he had yet undertaken, he had spent a large part of his leisure in making a report of the trade and contents of the store, which would be of service to his unlucky successor in the post of agent.

His chief cause for disquiet had been the hidden personality of the man whom he had seen in the sky, and who had afterwards rescued him from the blizzard near God's Voice. The haunting recollection of those eyes, of which he had caught but a glimpse as the man bent over him and the fire beat up into his shrouded face, had tortured him, allowing him rest from thought neither day nor night. For weeks he had searched his memory for some forgotten record, which would account for their seeming familiarity. Where had he seen them before? Was it before he left England, or in the Klondike? Or had their owner once come to trade with him at the store?

Ten days ago, when he was sitting half-dozing by the stove, thinking of nothing in particular, a face had drifted up from his subconscious memory, group-

ing its features about the eyes. He had staggered to his feet, horrified at the significance which this new knowledge, if true, gave to the motive of the crime. Bewildering details, which he had noticed in the man's appearance and had not been able to reconcile, now built themselves into the chain of evidence and were readily explained — there could be no mistake. He had bowed his head in his trembling hands, giving God broken thanks that he had been spared the final remorse which would have come to him had he been successful in his pursuit of Spurling's murderer. All that night he had prayed, aghast and terrified, that God would protect the assailant from detection.

And perhaps God had heard him, for the morning found him strangely quiet; he thought that he had now discovered a way to go out of life a gentleman, though no one but himself and one other would know that his gallantry was not disgrace.

The short December daylight wore away and night fell. He spread a meal for four people, with fare which was unusually ample. Having lit the lamp and built up a roaring fire in the stove, he sat down to await the arrival of his guests.

To evade his excitement of anticipation, which was becoming painful, he drove his thoughts back to other Christmas Eves, and tried to imagine and share in the innocent happiness which the season was bringing to children, still illusioned and unwise, all the world over that night. He had almost succeeded in beguiling himself into the belief that he was again a child, when the huskies commenced to howl, giving warning of someone's approach.

Listening acutely, he caught the distant shouting of

dog-drivers, coming down-river, across the ice. He ran to the window and saw the forms of two men, stooping down unharnessing their teams at the Point. He recognised them, but did not go outside to make them welcome, since he had not yet learnt their purpose. The door opened, and Beorn and Eyelids entered.

There was nothing altered in Beorn's appearance; but Eyelids looked haggard and fatigued with travel.

He came towards Granger with a stealthy tread, yet so slowly that he seemed rather to be drawing back. "Where's Peggy?" were the first words he uttered. "She's gone away," Granger said. Then, seeing her brother's genuine concern, he commenced to explain a little of what had taken place in his absence. He was recounting his discovery of Spurling's flight, when his listener, taking it for granted that he already knew the rest, broke in impatiently, with "You damn fool! Why'd you kill him?"

Granger smiled. He was amused at the half-breed's new air of domineering boldness and the change which it made in his countenance. "Oh, so you know that?" he inquired. Eyelids came over and shook him by the arm, as though he thought that he needed awakening.

Speaking rapidly, tumbling over his words, sometimes relapsing into the Cree dialect, he commenced to give a hurried account of his own actions. There had been a thousand dollars offered for Spurling's capture, and he had gone to claim it. It was not covetousness altogether which had prompted him to do that; the reward was only an incident. His father was determined to be revenged for the trespass of the Forbidden River, and he had accompanied his father, hoping, by so doing, to save his brother-in-law's life — the handing over of Spurling

to justice would have proved him innocent of complicity in Strangeway's death.

They had had to go a long way south before they had met with the winter patrol and had been able to give their information. They had been coming back with Sergeant Shattuck to make the arrest, when they had fallen in with an Indian of the Sucker tribe. He had given them news that a month ago a man had been murdered at the Dead Rat Portage by the agent at the Point, where he believed they had quarrelled, though why and what about he could not guess.

Arriving at God's Voice, they had learnt that gold had been found, scattered above the grave at the Dead Rat. And now the Mounted Police were coming, Eyelids said, to take Granger away to be hanged. He had heard Robert Pilgrim and the sergeant arranging it together, and had come on ahead to give him warning. He believed that the pursuers were not far behind. His quarrel had been with Spurling, not with Granger; he was emphatic about that. He would not have accompanied his father, had he not gathered from words which he had let fall in his delirium, that Granger hated Spurling as much as any of them. He had thought that he would understand their purpose in going southward, and would be willing to guard Spurling in order that he might be betrayed. And now he had come to make him an offer: there was yet time to escape; he would hide him so securely in the forest that he never would be tracked.

Granger thought that he discovered in Eyelids' vehemence the blustering confusion of a repentant Judas.

He shook his head, "No," he answered, "I intend to wait."

Eyelids pressed him for a reason. "I must see Peggy," he replied: "she will certainly be here to-night. Even if she had already arrived and were willing to go with me, I should stay."

For a man of Indian training, Eyelids used many words to persuade him. When he saw that he had failed, he relapsed into sullen silence. Beorn paid no attention, but stared grimly before him with his dead-soul eyes, as though he had heard nothing. Granger fancied that he must often have worn that same expression when, crouched beneath the auriferous ledges of the Fair-haired Annie, he had listened to the picks of his enemies drawing nearer, and had waited to deal out unhurried and impartial death to the men of the Bloody Thunder Mine.

There was the sound of long striding steps ascending the mound; it was not the tread of Peggy. Without the formality of knocking, the latch was raised and Père Antoine towered in the doorway. His garments were frosted and glistened, so that he seemed to be clothed in a vaporous incandescence. His face was very stern and sad. He said nothing, but gazing full on Granger, he beckoned to him that he should come outside.

Casting his capote about him and drawing on his mittens, he obeyed. Antoine led the way to the back of the store, till they stood on the edge of the clearing, where the forest began. The full moon shining down on the country made it appear legendary and ghost-like, a veritable Hollow land, such as the Indians believed in, entering into which a man might wander on forever, without home-coming, and never taste of death. Granger felt that he would scarcely experience surprise

were he to witness, drifting on poised wings from an opening in the clouds, a flight of shadowy angels, voyaging to some newer planet where they should startle other shepherds, singing to them the tidings of the Christ.

Antoine recalled him, saying, "I may not be doing right, for I cannot guess your motives, but I have come to tell you that I am willing to help you to escape."

If he had come to him on any other errand than that of his own preservation, Granger knew, as he watched the pity struggling with the sternness in his face, that he would have followed him anywhere, to peril and to shame. But now, that was impossible.

"Antoine," he replied, "I cannot. Spurling is dead."

Le Père surveyed him curiously in silence. "But you — did you do it?" he said.

"You know that I always meant to do it."

"Then you are determined to die?"

"Yes."

"For some one else?"

"Pshaw! For me it is no sacrifice. You know that I would have killed him, had God given me the time."

Antoine drew off his mitten, and held out to him his bare right hand. "You are a noble man," he said; "I will keep your secret."

As they returned to the shack, Eyelids looked up at them inquiringly, as though he were about to ask them what preparations he should make for their journey. When he saw how, saying nothing, they sat themselves down to wait, he shrugged his shoulders desperately. Presently, with a false show of indifference, he set about playing the moccasin-game, which consists of placing buttons, bullets, and anything small which comes handy,

into an empty moccasin, shaking them up together, and guessing the number which the shoe contains. It is a gambling game which, in earlier days, was wont to cause much bloodshed and ruin among the buffalo-runners of the plains.

The hours went by and the night grew late. The meal which had been spread was still untasted. They did not converse; there seemed so little to say, and, moreover, their voices might prevent them from hearing the first warning of Peggy's approach. The roaring of the logs in the stove, and the monotonous clicking of the buttons and bullets one against the other as Eyelids shook them, and again as he emptied them upon the floor, like the ominous tapping of muffled hammers at work about a coffin, were the only sounds, and these, at last, by reason of their regularity, began to grow nerve-racking. Between the emptying of the moccasin, and the gathering up and re-shaking of the counters, Granger held his breath. It seemed to him that Eyelids was gambling with an invisible player, and that the stake which he stood to lose or win was his own life. It was inconceivable that any man should have sat playing all these hours at a game of hazard, risking nothing, having for antagonist himself.

Relief came from without. From far across the river the forest-silence was shattered by a piercing cry. It reached him distantly at first, but, with each interval that elapsed, it grew nearer. It was like the tortured, desperate complaining of a soul in its final agony. Stealing to the window, he looked out, and saw upon the farther bank the outline of a timber-wolf. He looked at Beorn; he also had heard it, for he had pricked up his ears like a husky and was listening. Fearing that the

suspense of these long and silent hours might cause him to behave unworthily, he clutched Antoine by the shoulder, and whispered, "For God's sake, say something. Tell us one of your tales."

Then Le Père thought awhile, and afterwards, in a low sonorous voice, commenced to recount the story of the founding of the Huron Mission — one of the noblest histories in the world, of men who have died for men. As he progressed, Eyelids looked up from his moccasin-game and the little tappings, as of muffled hammers about a coffin, ceased for a spell.

He told them of Isaac Jogues, the Jesuit; how he was the most timid of men, and how for his love of Christ he became brave.

He told them of his capture, on the second day of August, 1642, by the Iroquois, and the patience with which his sufferings were endured. How when he was near dying of hunger and thirst, he used the drops of rain, which had gathered in an ear of corn which had been thrown him, to baptize two dying men. How when the Indians had grown weary of torturing him and had cast him out into the March bleakness, he spent his days in the forest praying, and carving the name of *Jesus* on the tree-trunks with his lacerated hands.

Then followed the account of his miraculous escape to France and the honours which were proffered him by Church and State, no one of which he would take, save only permission to return to Canada that, as he had lived, so he might die for men, and the Pope's special dispensation that he might say the Mass, from which he had been debarred by his mutilations.

And he told them the story of Brébeuf and the

vision which he had had in the winter of 1640, when sojourning among the Neutral Nation. How he beheld in the sky the apparition of a great cross, advancing towards him from the quarter where lay the Iroquois land. How he had spoken to his comrades about it, and they had questioned him, "What is it like? How large?" And he had answered them, saying, "It is large enough to crucify us all."

Granger interrupted him, smiling grimly to himself and whispering, "Yes, and I have seen it in Keewatin — *large enough to crucify us all.*"

Antoine, overhearing his words, replied, "I know you have." After which they fell silent. For perhaps an hour they remained thus, and the flame of the lamp sank lower and lower as the oil became exhausted; no one rose to attend to it.

A panting breath was heard outside. The door flew open and a man stood upon the threshold. "They are coming," he gasped in a rasping voice. "My God! they are coming."

No one stirred. They did not recognise his tones and it was too dark to see his face. They were each one wondering who was this stranger, who could find in the death of anyone, save himself, a matter for distress.

He closed the door; in so doing, they saw that he carried a bundle, like a deformity, strapped across his shoulders. They watched him in silence until, cowed by the coldness of their reception, he was turning to depart; then Antoine spoke up. "Come nearer the stove, my son," he said, "where you can warm yourself, and we can look upon your face."

Slowly the man moved forward, casting a long shadow on the wall. And now to the four men gazing, the

shadow which the stranger cast seemed to have become of more interest than his face — for there were two shadows, one of which followed ominously behind. While the first umbra was dim and blurred, the second was dense and well-defined; moreover it stood by itself, as if cast by an unseen presence, and was in every way different from that of the stranger. It seemed endowed with a separate personality; its actions were independent of those of the man and shadow which it followed. In watching it, they felt that there were six people in the room instead of five.

Recognition came to them each one at about the same time; they rose to their feet fascinated, and stared like men gone mad. The thing stood upright, a little way out from the wall it seemed, its head turned towards them, as if conscious of their inspection — *and yet it was only a shadow.* And it was the shadow of a man over six feet in height and proportionately broad of chest, who carried his dog-whip left-handed. It was the shadow which Spurling would have cast, had he been alive. And Spurling had cursed Granger merely for suggesting that, despite their preparations for departure, they might all meet again at Murder Point on Christmas Eve.

The stranger, being ignorant of what they saw, for whichever way he turned the pursuer stole behind him, and growing alarmed at their terrified expressions, withdrew from the circle of the lamp and firelight, willing to hide himself.

Granger was the first to remove his gaze from the wall and to recover from his surprise. He approached the shrinking figure. "Peggy," he cried: and as she turned, he saw that her capote was the one which he had missed,

and that the remainder of her man's dress was his own borrowed attire.

She came towards him with her arms stretched out and, as she did so, his heart was strangely stirred within him by a little puling cry.

"It was the only way to save you," she moaned; "and it has not saved you."

"I know, I understand," he whispered. Then he loosed her arms from about his neck and unslung the baby from her shoulders. Fear for their common safety struggling with the mother's pride and tenderness, she followed him to the firelight and allowed him to kneel beside her. Their bodies pressing close together, they wondered at and touched with a strange reverence the little weakly creature sprawling in her lap. It commenced to wail, and she bared to it her breasts. To Antoine watching her, she seemed the Madonna of Keewatin, with her stifled love, naked passions, and heroic fight for life — and to-morrow would be Christmas night.

In the presence of the child they had all forgotten the shadow, hovering there behind her, and the sorrow which it meant. Even Eyelids, the Judas of the tragedy, stole nearer and, extending his hands, touched shyly this frail body of newborn life, as if by so doing he could cleanse them. No one interfered with him; they were too glad. The Man with the Dead Soul looked on unmoved; his countenance was alone unchanged. He was listening intently.

A wolf-call broke the stillness of the night. Going to the door, he stepped out, threw back his head and answered. It was the sign for which he had waited. Eyelids snatched up his gun and placed himself before

Granger, prepared to defend him; but Granger took the gun from his hand. "No. Not that," he said.

Turning about, he saw that Peggy had risen and, with his child in her arms, was hurrying toward the threshold. Guessing her purpose, he caught her by the waist and drew her back. He led her to that corner of the room which was darkest, and, making her sit down, bent above her speaking in a low quick voice. For two minutes nothing was heard but her sobbing, the hissing of his whispered messages, and the slow, deep-drawn breathing of Eyelids and Antoine. They both knew now that he was innocent since they had seen the shadow. The air was heavy with suspense. There was a crunching of snow which came nearer, ascending the mound toward the shack. There was the sound of several footsteps, as of men taking up positions about the house. The door burst open and Beorn entered, followed by a man who, Granger guessed from his bearing and dress, was Sergeant Shattuck. It was his last chance to redeem himself.

He rose up, resting his hand on his wife's shoulder to keep her seated, and stood in front of her, hiding her from view, so that the sergeant should not see that tell-tale shadow behind her. Even while he held himself there in breathless silence, taking his first look at the man who had travelled all those miles only to carry him southward to his death, he smiled grimly, amused at the Homeric justice of it — that Spurling should have killed and been killed by a woman in disguise, and that on his head should rest the burden of the shame, he who throughout his life had never *done*, but had only *intended*.

Then the sergeant spoke. "John Granger, are you there?"

"I am."

"I arrest you, John Granger, on the charge of being concerned in the death of Corporal Eric Strangeways, and of the wilful murder of one Druce Spurling, your accomplice in the latter crime, whom you, well knowing that he was a fugitive from justice, assisted to escape from the afore-mentioned Eric Strangeways."

Peggy half rose to her feet, with a choking cry, and tried to speak; but Granger checked her.

"I plead guilty," he said; "I am ready to come with you. I have only one request to make, that you take me away with you at once, setting out this night."

The sergeant looked doubtful; he had made a long journey, and he and his dogs were tired. But hearing the sound of intolerable sobbing, he thought that he understood, and nodded his assent.

They all stepped out, closing the door behind them, and left Granger alone with his wife. In five minutes the door opened and he joined them. His face was grey and tremulous, but his lips were steady and smiling. "Large enough to crucify us all," murmured Antoine when he saw him. Granger knew what he meant — that he was referring to Keewatin and to his sacrifice. He shook his head at him; he was not thinking of that. He was thinking of Spurling's shadow, made prisoner by its own hatred, chained behind the woman weeping in the shack, and of how he had cheated it of its pitiful revenge. But it was not yet too late for one of his companions, or even Peggy herself, to betray his secret. He would not feel that she was safe until Murder Point had been lost to sight. Stepping briskly over to Shattuck he inquired, "Any need of handcuffs tonight, Sergeant?"

"Not if you pledge me your word," he replied: but he

spoke absent-mindedly, taking no steps toward departure. Granger grew impatient; every moment thus wasted might lose him his chance of making a decent exit from life. He had sought for so many things which he had not found, that he was now frenziedly covetous of attaining this last success.

"Sergeant, you remember your promise to me that . . ."

Before he had finished his sentence, Shattuck broke in on him excitedly, exclaiming, "By God, but it's you that it's wanting. Look, over there, down-river to the northeast."

Turning quickly about to the direction indicated, his eyes fell upon the bend. There, standing a short way out from the bank on the ice, so that he could see it clearly, was the figure of a man, *with the moonlight streaming through him.* Granger recognised him by his tallness and uprightness. He was waving to him, seeing which he waved back. As though he had been waiting for that permission, he began to move up-river with incredible swiftness towards the Point. Having come within hailing distance he halted, and putting his hands to his mouth shouted, "Be brave! Be brave! It is only death."

Had Strangeways stepped out from his grave to taunt him with the futility of his own words, which had been spoken to comfort him in his distress? The apparition was growing vaguer. Just before it vanished, it cried again and waved its hand, "Jesus of Galilee! Jesus Christ!"

The sound reached him faintly as a whisper. He thought that his own memory must have spoken till, turning round and scanning the other men's faces, he saw that they also had heard.

"What was it that he said?" asked Eyelids.

"Sounded as though he was swearing," Shattuck replied.

But Granger and Antoine knew better; they knew that it was the dead lover giving his approval of this last act of the rival who was to die for his death.

The sergeant required no further urging to hasten his departure. Descending to the river-bed, he harnessed in his huskies and set out up the Last Chance, taking with him the independent trader southwards, as he had so often desired, — but to be hanged.

THE END

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